

1952

The Non-Professional Theater in Louisiana.

Clinton W. Bradford

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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THE NON-PROFESSIONAL THEATER IN LOUISIANA
A SURVEY OF ORGANIZED AND MISCELLANEOUS THEATRICAL ACTIVITIES
FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO 1900

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech

by
Clinton William Bradford
B. A., University of Arkansas, 1938
M. A., State University of Iowa, 1941
August, 1951

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OUR DRAMATIC TALENT.



L. W. S——r as "Toodles," in the Glove scene. Performed at Male Academy,
April 29, 1875, for the benefit of the Presbyterian Church.

OUACHITA TELEGRAPH, Monroe, April 30, 1875
(see pp. 275-279)

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a survey of non-professional theatrical activities in Louisiana from the beginnings to the close of the nineteenth century. It includes a chronological record of events and discusses organized amateur theatrical groups, noting specifically the nature of their organizations and their objectives and giving some evaluation of the quality of their productions. Theater activities in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Lake Charles have been subjects for independent investigations and are therefore not included.

The three sections in the plan of this study represent three major chronological periods: the beginnings to the Civil War; the Period of Reconstruction, 1866-1880; and the last decades, 1880-1900. Separate chapters in each section present material covering four distinct geographic sections of the state: namely, the Florida Parishes, the Red River Area, the Bayou Country, and Northeast Louisiana.

The weekly newspapers published in Louisiana during the nineteenth century provide the chief source of information. Diaries, personal letters, and information contained in earlier investigations of other phases of the history of Louisiana supplement the newspaper records.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of settlement and growth for communities in Louisiana. To promote a better understanding of the sudden emergence of a flourishing

non-professional theater during the Reconstruction period, the first section of this study includes some community activities which are in no sense theatrical, to show the gradual development of these early settlements into unified social and cultural units.

Theater associations were organized in five communities at various times during the pre-war period: the St. Francisville Theater Association, formed during the winter of 1810-1811; the Alexandria Thespian Association, 1821; the Franklin Histrionic Association, 1850; the Clinton Shakespearean Society, 1855; and the Thibodaux Philharmonic Society, later the Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance, 1858. These early associations operated under adopted constitutions and by-laws administered by a president, secretary-treasurer, and stage manager; and they financed activities by subscription, by assessment of members, and by receipts from admissions to performances. They equipped small theaters in buildings already available and performed about every two weeks during the period of activity from repertoires of standard plays.

In the early years of Reconstruction, community groups presented variety programs of tableaux, charades, and music to finance the rehabilitation of institutions which had deteriorated during the war. Large numbers of people participated, and communities provided liberal patronage. These entertainments motivated a broad interest in amateur theatrical activity, which led to the formation of numerous well organized theater clubs in all of the principal towns of Louisiana. Two types of organizations were prevalent: those with restricted memberships of young men which presented

frequent regular dramatic programs for community entertainment and their own mutual improvement, and those with unrestricted memberships which gave less frequent dramatic programs but which provided a broader scope of entertainment including literary, music, and variety programs. Plays given during the Reconstruction period were the standard short comedies and farces and longer melodramas of the professional theater. Greater emphasis was given to original stump speeches, comic songs, and "Ethiopian farces" satirizing state and local Reconstruction government officials and burlesquing the recently emancipated Negro. Theaters were often converted storehouses; but in some cases they were public halls designed with stages, dressing rooms, and other standard theater appurtenances and often built by the local volunteer fire companies.

Organized amateur theater in Louisiana reached the peak of its development during the decade of the 1880's. It had improved theaters, capable directors, and experienced actors. Organizational objectives changed emphasis from that of providing entertainment for the community and financing local institutions to that of providing for the cultural development of their members. Programming changed to currently popular full-length plays and operettas. The short play was retained usually as a unit of the variety program with vocal and instrumental music and tableaux. Minstrel troupes frequently organized to give two or three programs of original routines. Volunteer fire companies, fraternal chapters, bands, and church and school groups sponsored entertainments frequently more spectacular than and of a quality equal to those of regularly organized dramatic clubs. These

groups programmed the same types of plays, and frequently combined the best of the directing and acting talents of various theater groups to assure successful productions.

By 1895, the theaters of the larger communities were under private management. Regular professional theater circuits gradually grew in importance after about 1880. During the time that the commercial theater was developing into a profitable business throughout the state, other phases of Louisiana's competitive economy were requiring a more concentrated industry on the part of greater numbers of people. Their interest in the social and cultural benefits of the community theater gave way to that of earning a livelihood. By the close of the century, amateur theater was reduced to small organized groups which gave two or three performances each year.

Notwithstanding this rapid decline during the closing decade of the century, amateur theater in Louisiana had developed a high degree of excellence during the nineteenth century. It served to bolster the general morale during the Period of Reconstruction; provided worthwhile amusement to the state throughout the century; and contributed materially to the social and cultural welfare of the people.

INTRODUCTION

Students of the early American theater are familiar with the fact that the beginnings of the theater in America were the beginnings of amateur theater history in America. Recorded stories of the performance of Captain Farfan's comedy treating the conquest of New Mexico by Spanish explorers on the Rio Grande in 1598, of three amateur actors' presentation of Ye Bare and Ye Cubb in Virginia in 1665, of the performance of Le Père Indien at the French Colonial Governor's mansion in New Orleans in 1753 have made legends of the events. They marked beginnings.

Then Murray and Kean and the Hallam Company came to the American colonies, and theater historians have followed them and their successors through a network of towns and cities, recording the events of the great American theater business. The Tabary company, Duff, Ludlow, and Caldwell successively came to New Orleans, and students of the theater have written their stories. After his rather brilliant beginning, the amateur actor and his non-professional company seemed to hold no interest for the chronicler; he seemed to have made his contribution and to have passed from the scene. Was his situation that of the "wily serpent" of the stage, as the eminent G. C. Odell suggests? Or did he go, missionary like, to the field of the small American community and continue his work of providing wholesome theatrical entertainment to those whom the professional theater could not reach?

After it became a part of the United States early in the nineteenth century, Louisiana quickly spread out from New Orleans into many small communities: to St. Francisville, to Alexandria; to Opelousas and Donaldsonville and Natchitoches. Yet almost all of the writers of

Louisiana theater history have remained in the Crescent City. Did the people of Alexandria provide theater for community entertainment? Did those of Opelousas? Of Natchitoches?

A generally thorough record of amateur theatrical activities in New Orleans has accumulated in recent studies of the city's professional stage. Kathryn Hanley's thesis reports amateur actors working in leading roles of early professional productions as a means of attracting larger audiences to the theater, several years before the first all-amateur performance in 1809.¹ Roger P. McCutcheon's article, "The First English Plays in New Orleans," (American Literature, XI ~~May, 1939~~ 183-199), also treats in detail the early organized non-professional theatrical groups in New Orleans. Alban Fordesh Varnado's thesis, A History of Theatrical Activity in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1819-1900, (Louisiana State University, 1947), surveys non-professional theatrical productions in Baton Rouge from the time the Thespian Society was organized in 1841 to 1900. In The Plays of Judge Felix Voorhies, an unpublished thesis (Louisiana State University, 1940) by Marcelle Frances Schertz, appears not only an excellent discussion of the dramatic writings (in French) of one of the most outstanding figures in the Louisiana amateur theater during the nineteenth century, but also an account of the St. Martinville theater which Judge Voorhies directed. Brief discussions of organized theater

¹ Kathryn Tierney Hanley, The Amateur Theatre in New Orleans Before 1835, (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Tulane University, 1940), pp. 14, 42.

groups in Franklin² and Alexandria³ are contained in recent studies of the social history of St. Mary and Rapides parishes.

Except for the New Orleans and Baton Rouge studies, the written history of the non-professional theater in Louisiana covers only brief periods in scattered areas. In those theses only three communities have been treated at all. That those writers found that community theatrical organizations had contributed toward the social and cultural development of the people in the small areas treated in their studies is significant; each author has contributed to the total history of the theater in Louisiana. In his study Varnado reported that the Plaquemine Dramatic Association gave performances in Baton Rouge on May 20 and 21, 1879, for the benefit of the Confederate Memorial Fund.⁴ The following week the editor of the Weekly Advocate of Baton Rouge proposed a series of tournament-like performances involving theatrical groups in a number of parishes.

. . . A good idea has been suggested to us by a gentleman who takes a great interest in drama, and we throw out the suggestion for the consideration of our readers. It is this: That our citizens make arrangements for a grand entertainment to take place at some feasible date in the coming fall or winter for the benefit of the Confederate Memorial Association, that a prize be offered to the best Amateur Dramatic Troupe among the troupes organized in the parishes of Iberville, Ascension, East and West Feliciana, Pointe Coupee, East and West Baton Rouge and other parishes who may desire

² Jewel Lynn de Brummond, A Social History of St. Mary Parish From 1845-1860, (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1948) pp. 85-86.

³ William Edward Highsmith, Social and Economic Conditions in Rapides Parish During Reconstruction, (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1947), 161-165.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 34.

to compete; that a professional actor be selected to select from all these troupes a cast to play, for instance, the Lady of Lyons on that occasion. . . .⁵

Varnado found no evidence indicating that the tournament idea was carried out. However, this 1879 proposal implied that extensive amateur theatrical activity was being conducted in Louisiana. The fact that nothing is known of the non-professional theater in the state during the nineteenth century has motivated the present investigation.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to determine (1) the extent of non-professional theatrical activities in the various communities of Louisiana during the nineteenth century and (2) the degree to which these activities were provided by local theatrical organizations, to include (a) the nature of the organizations, (b) their objectives, and (c) some general evaluation of the quality of their productions.

Weekly newspapers published in Louisiana during the nineteenth century provide the principal source of information concerning the non-professional theater during the period. The newspaper and microfilm departments of Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, have the largest collection of Louisiana weeklies in the state. Less extensive collections of nineteenth century newspapers are at Howard Memorial Library, Tulane University; Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; Southwestern Louisiana Institute Library, Lafayette, Louisiana; and Northwestern State College Library, Natchitoches, Louisiana. Important private collections include those at the office of the St. Francisville Democrat, St. Francisville, Louisiana; at the Daily Town Talk office, Alexandria,

⁵Varnado, op. cit., pp. 34-35. Quoted from the Baton Rouge Weekly Advocate, May 30, 1879.

Louisiana; and at The Daily Iberian office, New Iberia, Louisiana.

A few important items of information are contained in the extensive holdings of prominent early Louisiana family papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. A minute book of the Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance de Thibodaux in the Dansereau Collection furnished the only information that has been discovered concerning that early organization in Thibodaux. A pocket diary for 1855 in the Henry W. Marston Collection of Family Papers supplemented the newspaper record of the early theater organization at Clinton, Louisiana. A small number of letters contributed facts and comments which were helpful.

Three initially prescribed limitations have restricted the scope of this study. (1) New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Lake Charles are excluded--the first two cities, because non-professional theater activities are surveyed in existing studies; the last two, because their theater histories are subjects for similar independent investigations. (2) Only communities having English theatrical activities are included; however, the dramatic efforts of French groups are recorded in towns where both English and French plays were produced. (3) Professional theatrical activity in the various communities is discussed, particularly during the beginning and closing periods, to indicate its relationship with and possible influence upon the non-professional theater.

Three other factors have required important modifications in the study. (1) A paucity of information for certain communities over extended periods of time has imposed unfortunate restrictions throughout the process of the investigation. Weekly newspapers published in Louisiana before the Civil War are extremely rare. Scattered issues are available from Alexandria in central Louisiana; St. Francisville and Clinton in the Florida

Parishes; Plaquemine, Franklin, and Opelousas in the Bayou Country of southern Louisiana; and a very few late issues from Monroe in northeast Louisiana. Better files of newspapers published after the Civil War are available. For Alexandria, St. Francisville, Plaquemine, Thibodaux, and Opelousas they are virtually complete. Weeklies covering the last quarter of the nineteenth century are preserved from Covington, Napoleonville, Abbeville, St. Martinville, and Lake Providence. Monroe, Donaldsonville, Convent, New Iberia, Lafayette, and Natchitoches are covered for brief important periods. (2) Other types of organized group activities have demanded consideration in this study.⁶ Church groups, schools, literary societies, debate clubs, philharmonic societies, and theatrical groups commonly sought favor with the populations and the talents and leisure time of leading performers in the community. Throughout this study, and particularly in the early section, therefore, frequent mention is made of group activities which are in no sense theatrical.

The material of this study is presented in three sections, each covering a distinct chronological period. The first section extends from the beginnings to the Civil War. The Reconstruction Period -- 1866-1880 -- is covered in the second section; and the final section treats the last

⁶ In the early communities of Louisiana certain types of community group activities followed generally a chronological development. Significantly, community theater came late in the chronology. Granting the precedence of community government, religious organizations provided the first group activities--church services and such other undertakings as the minister, the recognized leader, directed. Next in order were the schools: the private academies subscribed to by all economically efficient citizens; the short-term music schools, catered to by a more select economic group; and finally, the short-term dancing schools, patronized by an even more select group of citizens. Schools provided opportunity for active group participation in public performances. Still, a recognized leader, the teacher, directed activities.

Elementary, but important, were the semi-private, informal soirees

two decades of the nineteenth century. Sections are divided into four chapters, each of which discusses one of four geographic areas of the state. Comprising the distinct areas are (1) the Florida Parishes, that part of Louisiana east of the Mississippi River and north of Lake Pontchartrain, an area settled chiefly by emigrants from the American Colonies and eastern southern states and subjected to little of the French influence in Louisiana; (2) the Red River Area, comprising those parishes bordering Red River, the chief transportation thoroughfare across central Louisiana during most of the nineteenth century; (3) the Bayou Country, those parishes west of the Mississippi River south of Baton Rouge and along Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche, the area of strongest French influence

conducted alternately in the homes of the citizens. Decorum at these events fluctuated with the degree of regard held among the guests for the host; however, adequate opportunity was provided for the audience-performer relationship as groups of dancers alternated in the limited dancing area. As the community developed the soirées were more frequently conducted in public halls as masquerade, fancy dress, or grand balls under the management of citizens who were elected to perform certain duties or who assumed those duties by virtue of their acknowledged positions in the community. A similar activity was the very early community-wide celebration ceremonies of patriotic holidays and anniversaries of special events.

Then appeared literary societies, frequently called lyceums, for the cultural development and quasi-theatrical amusement of the more cultivated among the populations. The societies were regularly organized; however, performers were individuals--orators, dramatic readers, instrumental and vocal soloists, and eventually, debaters. Co-existing with the literary societies were the less frequent community music clubs and the numerous band organizations. Almost immediately followed the theatrical organization, demanding greater time, more performers concerting their efforts, and performances appealing to whole populations.

Succeeding types of activities of necessity were influenced by earlier types as their participants grew in experience. Early theatrical groups worked more efficiently and secured greater community support in towns where lyceums, philharmonic societies, debate clubs, and band organizations preceded them.

in the state;⁷ and (4) Northeast Louisiana, roughly those parishes served by the Ouachita River and the area lying between the Ouachita and Mississippi Rivers.

Each chapter presents a chronology of theatrical activity in its respective area arranged by individual community. The chronicle of events is interrupted only for brief discussions of the formation, purposes, and accomplishments of organized theatrical groups wherever they occur.

Summary conclusions pertinent to the findings presented in the discussion follow in a final separate chapter.

⁷ H. S. Harrison, "Distribution of French Speech," (Chart, December, 1948) Linguistic Atlas of Louisiana, Department of Speech, Louisiana State University. According to Mrs. Harrison's survey, fifteen parishes in southern Louisiana had more than fifty percent French speaking populations. Nine other adjacent parishes showed a French speaking population of between ten and fifty percent.

THE BEGINNINGS TO THE CIVIL WAR

CHAPTER I

THE FLORIDA PARISHES

St. Francisville

At the time of the beginnings of non-professional theatrical activities at St. Francisville during the winter months of 1810-1811, that part of Louisiana lying east of the Mississippi River and north of Lake Pontchartrain was busily adjusting allegiances to a new form of government. Only since November, 1810, had the Florida Parishes been under the jurisdiction of Governor Claiborne of the Orleans Territory.¹ This area, known as New Feliciana at that time, had remained in the possession of Spain after the purchase of the Louisiana Territory until an organized revolt of the citizens had overthrown the Spanish garrison at Baton Rouge and established their own government at St. Francisville in October, 1810.¹

The early settlers of the area of the Felicianas were principally descendants of the British colonists, or emigrants from the United States, and continued occupation by the Spanish government after 1803 gave rise to most uncertain conditions. The Spanish civil government had been especially ineffective; yet the change to that of the United States had not been conducive to a sudden stabilization of conditions.² A letter,

¹ "Historical Sketch," Inventory of Parish Archives of Louisiana: West Feliciana (St. Francisville), Louisiana Historical Records Survey, Ms., Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

² Alcee Fortier, A History of Louisiana, (New York: Manzi, Joyant and Company, Successors, 1904) III, pp. 39, 64-70.

dated March 10, 1811, addressed to John Avery Collins, New Port, Rhode Island, from Josiah Lawton, who at the time was attempting to enter business in St. Francisville, relates examples of lax business dealings.³ The tenor of this uncertain feeling among the inhabitants is further reflected in the review of a public exhibition at Bayou Sara at which was staged a combat between "THE ASIATIC TIGER AND A BULL":

. . . The combat did not continue more than a minute and a half, when victory (was) declared for the bull. This battle may be considered as ominous. When the Spanish tiger fretted the Florida bull, he met with the same fate; and those who know his powers, would do well to treat him kindly--for although, when well treated, he is the most docile and tractable animal on earth, yet he will not bear too much goading, and once enraged, he becomes the terror of his assailants.⁴

Situated on the bluff approximately one mile from the Mississippi River, St. Francisville communicated with the steamboat thoroughfare by way of Bayou Sara, the early trading community at the mouth of Bayou Sara "under the hill." The two villages became one municipality in 1819.⁵ St. Francisville and Bayou Sara became separate corporations later

³ Letter, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. Following a discussion of personal business, the writer concludes: "I cannot add anything pleasing--we are in anxiety about this Country not having as yet heard what Congress have done about it. There has been much stir here within a few days occasioned by the vigorous manner in which the American Laws have brought some people's noses to the Grindstone--this occasioned much murmuring amongst the lower classes & two or three nights ago the Convention flag was raised & after waving for one day the Citizens assembled & cut down the flag staff. The next day the flag was buried with considerable ceremony, but the disaffected person or some of their Agents last night dug up the Coffin as if determined not (to) be in peace--how this matter will end is impossible to conjecture. . . ."

⁴St. Francisville Time Piece, May 9, 1811. cf. Elrie Robinson, Biographical Sketches, James M. Bradford Pioneer Printer (St. Francisville: 1938) p. 22.

⁵Louisiana Acts, 1819, p. 34.

and a healthy rivalry existed between their citizenry following the Civil War. When the river traffic lost its importance late in the nineteenth century, however, Bayou Sara lost its prestige and so seldom appears on maps of the area today. The theatrical and other community organizations drew their members from both villages and will be discussed in this study in the name of St. Francisville.

On April 4, 1811, the first issue of the Time Piece, St. Francisville's first weekly newspaper, was published. In its fourth number St. Francisville's earliest known theatrical organization inserted the following announcement:

NOTICE

A meeting of the subscribers to the St. Francisville Theatrical Association, not having taken place according to appointment, it is earnestly requested that they meet at Lewis' hotel, to-morrow evening, 26th inst. as business of importance, relative to the association, requires immediate attention. R. C. SMYTH, Secretary.⁶

Present information concerning this early non-professional theater group is limited to the above notice and two insertions in the Time Piece during the following October. Nom de plume HOMILETICUS wrote a public letter, which was published in the weekly early in October, calling the association members from their inactivity. The writer revealed that the St. Francisville Theatrical Association was "spiritedly commenced" the previous season. Members drew up a constitution for their government, chose managers, and expended certain funds for scenic decorations. HOMILETICUS insisted that the "specimens (of talent) displayed during the short theatrical campaign of last season" were sufficient in number and of a quality to insure a "respectable association where objects might embrace declamatory

⁶ Time Piece, April 25, 1811.

NOTICE.

☞ A meeting of the subscribers to the St. Francisville Theological Association, not having taken place according to appointment, it is earnestly requested that they meet at Lewis' hotel, to-morrow evening, 26th inst. as business of importance, relative to the association, requires their immediate attention.

R. C. SMYTH,

April 25.

Secretary.

THE TIME PIECE

St. Francisville, April 25, 1811

improvements generally, as well as dramatic entertainment."⁷

Subsequently, an advertisement called the subscribers to a meeting to be held at the Hotel on Monday evening, October 28. Appended were the names of Amos Webb and Wm. Lyon, respectively the president and secretary "pro tem."⁸

Since both the April and the October meetings were held at the Hotel, the association's early productions possibly took place there. Inns or hotels in frontier settlements as a rule provided a large room where concerts, lectures, and other types of entertainments were conducted by both community and professional groups. In September the Hotel, listed for rent, was described as

. . . That commodious HOUSE in Royal street, next door to Mr. Lawton's store, and formerly occupied by Wm. Lewis, Esq. For elegance of situation, and pleasantness of structure, it is superior to any house in town.⁹

On the other hand, the Theatrical Association may have staged its productions from the beginning of the organization in "the house lately occupied as a Theatre" which burned in 1821.

. . . This morning the house lately occupied as a Theatre, and owned by Mr. Miller, with the scenery, &c., was totally destroyed--For some time the destruction of the town seemed inevitable, but a heavy rain which had fallen previous to the breaking out of the fire, and the favorable direction of the wind, enabled our citizens to prevent its farther progress. A Town meeting is requested at the Hotel on Saturday morning at 10 o'clock.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., October 10, 1811.

⁸ Ibid., October 24, 1811.

⁹ Ibid., September 12, 1811.

¹⁰ St. Francisville Asylum and Feliciana Advertiser, November 22, 1821.

That the fire threatened to destroy the town indicates that the theater was located within the village limits. Further, the fact that the "scenery &c.," remained in the building and that it had been "lately used as a Theatre" suggests that the St. Francisville Theatrical Association continued its activities for some time after 1811. The present fragmentary information reveals, therefore, that the association organized during the winter months of 1810-1811, built up a membership through subscriptions, adopted a governing constitution, provided stage scenery, and produced plays during 1811. At an undetermined time between the beginning and 1821, the Association equipped as a theater a building belonging to Mr. Miller; and that building with its theatrical equipment burned on November 22, 1821.

With their community theatrical organization in 1811 St. Francisville citizens established their earliest schools and churches. In the fall the Feliciana Academy, supported by subscriptions, opened at a vacant residence about three miles from the village. Clark Woodruff was in charge, and offered instruction in English grammar, arithmetic, surveying, geography, elocution and composition.¹¹ Persons interested in the building of "A MEETING HOUSE, to be under the direction of the Reverend Dr. Houston," were invited to meet in St. Francisville on Sunday, September 8, to select trustees and decide upon details for the construction.¹² Other ordinary but essential activities of a thriving community were present in St. Francisville. The Masonic fraternity established a lodge before June, 1819, at which time Thomas Cooper was

¹¹ Time Piece, August 15, 1811.

¹² Ibid.

serving as lodge secretary. The citizens founded a subscription library which by the beginning of 1823 had lapsed into a "languishing condition." The village printer, in an effort to revive the library association, bought from subscribers who had originally invested in the association but who now had become disinterested, their invested interests and led the library association in a general reorganization.¹³ New trustees were elected, a library room was secured, and the St. Francisville Library became one of the more energetic organizations during the following years.¹⁴ Professor Labadie began a dancing and music school in February, 1822; and Mr. Muscarelli conducted similar schools in the spring of 1825. Music teachers and dancing-masters like Labadie and Muscarelli, well trained and talented, traveled from village to village, even from state to state, during the early years of the nineteenth century. These itinerant teachers followed a practice of contracting with groups of leading citizens in the various communities to teach short sessions during the progress of which they would conduct public exhibitions and grand balls in which they and their pupils were featured performers.

Another rich and frequent native amusement in small Louisiana towns during this early period was special day celebrations. Independence Day, the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans, and Washington's Birthday were favorite occasions in St. Francisville during the succeeding years. On Independence Day, 1819, citizens met for dinner at the school house. Moses Horn, Esq., was the host.¹⁵ At the celebration in

¹³ Asylum and Feliciana Advertiser, January 23, 1823.

¹⁴ St. Francisville Louisiana Journal, April 14, 1825.

¹⁵ The Louisianian, July 10, 1819.

1823 Lewis Oldenburg furnished the banquet. On that occasion Judge Butler was appointed president of the day; Dr. Thomas W. Chinn, vice-president. After the meal was finished and the "cloth was removed," H. C. Withers, Esq., read the Declaration of Independence and William Thompson, Esq., delivered a patriotic address. A prepared program of toasts to historic and patriotic subjects were drunk by the company.¹⁶

Young gentlemen of St. Francisville celebrated the anniversary of the victory of New Orleans with a Grand Military Ball on Friday, January 7, 1825. The managers of the ball announced prior to the event:

. . . that the officers belonging to the several companies of Militia in this and the adjoining parishes and counties, who may be inclined to attend, may appear in the uniforms of their respective corps, in order to give as much effect as possible to an occasion so fraught with brilliant recollections to every inhabitant of Louisiana and her sister states in this section of the Union. . . .

The participants were not restricted to the military, however, and the citizens were invited to attend "in such costume as they may think proper to adopt."¹⁷ These entertainments usually took place in the "Long Room" of the Exchange Hotel. There, too, were held the not infrequent exhibitions of visiting professional entertainers.

The lecturer and the variety song, dance, and recitation program provided the more frequent commercial entertainments. Dr. Russel gave at Mr. Callender's house on November 18, 1819, a lecture on chemistry "introductory to forming a class to attend through the ensuing winter a series of Chemical Lectures, with suitable experiments."¹⁸ Dr. Preston

¹⁶ The Asylum, July 5, 1823.

¹⁷ Ibid., December 25, 1824.

¹⁸ The Louisianian, November 13, 1819.

of New York lectured on nitrous oxide or "Exhilarating Gas" at the Long Room on February 21 and March 1, 1822. According to the editor of the weekly, Preston's experiment "to the philosophic and curious. . . cannot be more interesting." Price of admission was one dollar, and the seats were "arranged to accomodate ladies."¹⁹

Among the more theatrical entertainments during this period was Carr and Boyle's one night program of "Songs and Recitations" at the Long Room of the Exchange Hotel on December 22, 1821.²⁰ Both actors had appeared with the W. Jones Theatrical Company in Baton Rouge during the previous May and June, and in February and March, 1822, they appeared in the non-professional productions of the Alexandria Thespian Society. Mrs. McBride and her daughters gave two vocal and instrumental music concerts "with juvenile recitations" in January, 1823.²¹ During the following March Mr. Lewis and his musical family of five played in St. Francisville. Lewis and his children, ages between four and ten, advertised as "the same whose late performances, in all the principal cities, received such universal applause." Their instruments were the piano, pedal harp, violin, and violin-cello.²²

Of a similar nature was the program by Mr. Ellene, "an Italian Troubadour," who performed on a number of instruments at one time.²³ Listed were the triangle, drum, "new fashioned violin," Italian flute, Turkish cymbal, and Chinese parasol--a collection as formidable and

¹⁹ Asylum and Feliciana Advertiser, February 20, 27, 1822.

²⁰ Ibid., December 20, 1821.

²¹ Ibid., January 23, 1823.

²² Ibid., March 20, 1823

²³ Asylum, February 5, 1825.

inviting to the curious as Dr. Russel's chemistry apparatus probably had been. In May a troupe of three--Mr. Vaughan, his son, nine, and his daughter, five--appeared in two programs of dramatic selections including a farce called The Inn, or Shoot Folly As It Flies. Vaughan's notice indicated that his family had played in the Boston, New York, and New Orleans theaters. Their performances were the first professional dramatic productions recorded in St. Francisville, and the audiences expressed great delight with them.²⁴

Mr. Snell gave performances including a display of fireworks, balloon ascension, and a cotillion party at the hotel on March 21 and April 11, 1825. The first program was a preliminary exhibition for charity which netted twenty-five dollars.²⁵ No less novel were the "astonishing powers of Ventriloquism" displayed by Mr. Nichols at the St. Francisville Hotel on May 16. This was a repeat performance at the "particular request of several respectable individuals." The program consisted of a series of five exercises in ventriloquism, and imitations of sounds to differentiate between the "art of imitating sounds and the powers of Ventriloquism."²⁶

For the period between 1825 and the Civil War the available information merely suggests what variety of amusements were provided in St. Francisville. An Equestrian circus stopped for performances during the second week in May, 1828.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., May 28, 1825.

²⁵ Louisiana Journal, March 24, 1825.

²⁶ Ibid., May 12, 1825.

²⁷ The Crisis, May 10, 1828.

Outdoor sports had enthusiastic followings. Horse Racing was a beloved sport of young and old alike, and horsemanship was a prided accomplishment among the young men. Bayou Sara boasted a cock pit.²⁸

Sometime before 1852 St. Francisville citizens built a public market-house, located on the site of the present city hall. The brick stall partitions, according to the older inhabitants of the town today, form a part of the foundation and framework of the present building. The original market-house was also used as a show place. The Sweeney Minstrels performed in it in December, 1852. On Christmas night the troupe gave a final performance of their "mirth-provoking and unique concerts" by request of the citizens. The performance began at seven o'clock in the evening, and the front seats were "reserved for the ladies."²⁹ The final theatrical entertainment recorded before the war was a local talent concert, "vocal and instrumental," given at the Market-house on Monday, January 18, 1858.³⁰ Following the war the St. Francisville Social Club converted the Market-house into a community theater where the group presented their regular music and dramatic performances.

²⁸ The Democrat, December 2, 1841.

²⁹ Bayou Sara Ledger, December 25, 1852.

³⁰ The Phoenix Ledger, January 16, 1858.

Jackson

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century Jackson, Louisiana, became the educational center of the Florida Parishes area. Located on Thompson's Creek about twelve miles east of St. Francisville, Jackson was equally accessible to the more densely populated area along the Mississippi River and the prosperous agricultural center around Clinton farther to the east. The College of Louisiana was established by the state legislature in 1825, resulting from recommendations of a joint committee of both legislative houses on public education in December, 1820.³¹ Financial difficulties during the years following 1825 led to a transfer of the school to the Methodist Church organization of the area and the name of the College of Louisiana was changed to Centenary College of Louisiana in 1839. The Mathews Academy and the Jackson Female Seminary, both private schools, had become well known in the area by 1841.³²

Public exhibitions and examinations by the private schools, and inter-society competitions between the two literary societies of the college provided programs of public interest before the Civil War. No record of community-sponsored activities during the period has been discovered.

³¹ Fortier, op. cit., III, pp. 191-193.

³² St. Francisville Feliciana Republican, January 30, 1841.

Clinton

Of group activities in Clinton, however, more is known. Though this area of the Florida Parishes was an abundant producer of cotton, it was settled more slowly and somewhat later than the territory along the Mississippi River. The settlers were English, having moved from the colonies during the period of the American Revolution or during the early years of the nineteenth century. They were protestant, the majority of the first settlers being of the Methodist or Baptist faiths.³³ The Academy of Clinton, opened in 1826, was the first village school.³⁴ Six years later the Clinton Female Academy was established.³⁵

The Clinton Debating Society was active during 1837 and 1838. On July 29, 1837, the group conducted its third public debate at the Clinton Methodist church. The event was "numerously attended by ladies and gentlemen, and the debate went off with great satisfaction and applause." In closing his brief review of the debate a few days later, the local editor wrote of the organization:

. . .It should be patronized by all who feel an interest in the literary advancement of the country, and who believe that intellectual improvement is advantageous and necessary to the continuance of our prosperity and happiness.³⁶

³³ "Historical Sketch," Louisiana Historical Records Survey, MS., Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

³⁴ "Regulations for the Government of the Academy of Clinton," Ellis Collection, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

³⁵ Louisiana Historical Records Survey, Op. cit.

³⁶ The Louisianian, August 9, 1837.

R. C. Gordon, the secretary of the society in September, was succeeded by G. A. Stevens in October. No other officers or members of the club have been identified. Their public debates were conducted in the evenings, at first in local churches. Beginning in August meetings were held at the parish courthouse. Early in 1838 the society began a series of discussions, possibly to open the activity for greater participation of the members. Questions scheduled for discussion on March 31 and May 26, respectively, were "Should ministers of the Gospel be eligible to office in the United States?" and "Which is the most important for Republican Government, the education of the Male or the Female?"³⁷

During the last week in May, 1838, a troupe of professional actors from the St. Charles Theater gave a series of performances in Clinton, probably in the courtroom of the parish courthouse, providing the first legitimate theater entertainment recorded there. On May 25 the local newspaper announced plans of the company to give their first representation on May 28, and expressed the anticipation that should greet them:

We are happy to inform our citizens, that a Dramatic corps from the St. Charles Theatre, will shortly pay our little town a visit, and for a few evenings, entertain us with "fun and frolic." As we consider Theatrical representations calculated to instruct as well as amuse, let us all be in attendance, and on Monday evening next, give them a cheerful welcome. . . .³⁸

Only five members of the company were identified--Fenner, Pacaud, Parette, Mrs. Pierce and Miss Chester. Evidently touring the smaller communities of Louisiana during a lax season in New Orleans, the troupe

³⁷ Ibid., March 28; May 18, 1838.

³⁸ Ibid., May 26, 1838.

remained in Clinton a week. In its June 1 issue the Louisianian reported that the actors had been "amusing us during the week," and had performed Pisarro the preceding evening with an effectiveness "beyond all expectations." Pacaud was scheduled for a benefit on June 1, which fact marked him as perhaps the most experienced among the actors and possibly as the manager of the troupe. The company had gone by the end of the following week, at which time the Louisianian published a card of thanks to the people of Clinton for ". . . liberal [sic] patronage they received at their hands during their stay among them. . . ."

Clinton gained communication with the Mississippi River with the completion of the Clinton-Port Hudson railroad in 1840. The new transportation line not only proved an economic boon for the rich cotton-growing district, but it invited a greater variety of entertainers to visit Clinton.

The Louisiana State Legislature incorporated the East Feliciana Lyceum in 1842. Twenty-four original members, named in the act of corporation, included George W. Munday, W. C. Williams, B. F. Wharton, George Daugherty, J. D. McFarland, R. H. Carouth, W. H. H. Coates, W. H. Eaton, James Gair, Thomas Freeland, Mark Boatner, Jr., James Holmes, William Langfitt, James Hughes, L. H. Davis, Bythell Haynes, J. R. Collinworth, Anderson Brown, R. M. Walker, George W. Norwood, H. G. Gay, John Morgan, Thorton Lawson, and James M. Roberts.³⁹ Evidence of the activity of the lyceum in Clinton is completely lacking.

Local dancing schools, lecturers, and quasi-theatrical entertainers provided amusements during the following years. Castanis, the

³⁹ Louisiana Acts, 1842, No. 84, p. 198.

Greek, performed at the courthouse on March 24, 1846. In comparing his program with the two "well received" concerts by Mr. Friend during the first week of April, a Clinton editor described Castanis' unsatisfactory performances as "theatrical fantasticals, and insipid love stories."

J. Devoti, a New Orleans dancing teacher, opened a school in Clinton on August 20 and continued into November. Separate classes for gentlemen and ladies, meeting twice each week, proposed to teach ". . . the graceful carriage of the person, the most approved and fashionable steps, and the variety of figures in cotillions and contra-dances." During the course Devoti presented his classes in four "society balls" at the Killian Hotel ballroom. Single admissions to the balls were two dollars, with general tickets to the series of four entertainments priced at six dollars.⁴⁰

John Killian opened his new hotel in September. Built of brick, the big house contained apartments where families could "be accommodated with as much comfort and privacy" as single gentlemen who wished board or lodging. Of particular note were the "Two Rooms, both of magnificent proportions, for Balls, Parties, &c., &c. . . ."⁴¹ In November Mrs. C. M. Hunt assumed management of "that large and commodious brick hotel on the corner, formerly occupied by Capt. Killian. . . ." and known as the Clinton House. The Clinton House ballroom was frequently used for local entertainments; with the courtroom of the parish courthouse, Killian's new hotel, Clinton's places for community amusements totaled three during the following years.

⁴⁰ Clinton Louisiana Floridian, August 29; September 26; November 7, 1846.

⁴¹ Ibid., September 26, 1846.

S. P. Stickney's famous equestrian troupe from the American Theater in New Orleans appeared in Clinton for performances on November 30, 1846. In January, 1847, the Charnocross Family stopped for a three-evening engagement on the 13th, 14th, and 15th; their "exhibitions" gave such "general and deserved satisfaction" that the troupe was induced to play on the 18th and 19th before proceeding to Baton Rouge.

A group of citizens sponsored a grand soiree at Killian's ballroom on February 24, 1849. A local band under the direction of Mr. Robinson, assisted by Mr. Richards, provided music. The admission fee was one dollar for gentlemen; Edward Delony, C. H. Walter, and Killian served as managers. Following a discussion during June concerning the use of the courthouse for public balls, the police jury resolved to enforce an earlier ruling which prohibited them; however, the use of the house "for other puposes, of a public character. . . ." continued. Probably the first event at the courthouse following the ruling to restrict its use was the Independence Day celebration. Customarily the Fourth of July was a festive occasion. To organize plans the people of Clinton met at the courthouse early in June. John Killian was elected chairman and R. C. Carman secretary of the temporary group organization. Preston Pond, Esq., and G. W. Reese, respectively, were choices of the committee to deliver the occasional oration and to read the Declaration of Independence.⁴²

Little change in the amount or variety of amusements occurred during the next five-year period in Clinton. P. Clissey taught a dancing school at Killian's hotel during the summer months of 1849.

⁴² Clinton Felician Whig, June 13, 1849.

Professor Wright, a humorous lecturer, was scheduled to appear in a program at Killian's on October 31. In February, 1850, the Raymond & Company's Menagerie exhibited for one day; and the Fourth of July brought its usual entertaining activities with Franklin Hardesty, Esq., as Reader of the Declaration of Independence and W. J. A. Roberts, Esq., as orator. Mr. Carr, "the Fire King, or the American Salamander," advertized to give an afternoon gymnastic performance on September 7. In February, 1851, Miss Morton, a concert violinist and singer, scheduled a concert at the Killian House, and the Frederick E. Bruns Family opened a dancing academy at the Killian House in April, at the time announcing plans for a "Grand Pupils' Ball once a week. . . ." during the period that the school continued.

The record of activities in Clinton is blank for the remainder of 1851 and the three years following. Professional entertainment probably continued much as it had been during the previous decade. However, interest in local theatrical activity evidently developed among greater numbers of the citizens. At the close of 1854 the Clinton Trio Club and the town's first amateur theatrical group, The Clinton Thespian Society, had organized to launch an energetic theater program during 1855.

The Clinton Thespian Corps gave their initial public performance on January 8, 1855, at Thespian Hall. Their first play was The Secret, or the Hole in the Wall, and the Clinton Trio Club provided music. The program was repeated on January 12,⁴³ after which the newly formed amateur group put into rehearsal The Lady of Lyons. To permit sufficient time for rehearsal and ". . . for the proper decoration and fitting up

⁴³ Clinton American Patriot, January 10, 17, 1855.

CONCERT OF THE CLINTON TRIO CLUB.

To be given at THESPIAN HALL, Clinton on
● MONDAY EVENING, Jan. 8th, 1855.

Programme.

- 1.—Overture to Opera, *La Gazza Ladra*, Rossini.
 - 2.—Gipsy Polka, Lampi.
 - 3.—Flute Solo, from the Opera, *Zennata*, Auber.
 - 4.—Chorus, by the CLINTON QUARTETTE CLUB,
G. ROSENBERG, Vocal Conductor.
 - 5.—Elfin Waltz, Lalytzky.
 - 6.—Song, "Gaily to Joy Inviting," from the Opera of
the Prophet, Meyerber.
 - 7.—Bird Waltz, Jungel.
 - 8.—Cotillon, from the Opera of the Black Domino.
 - 10.—Flute Solo, (Queen Cyprus,) Halevy.
 - 11.—Violin Solo, by H. A. Nicholls.
 - 12.—Differ Grand March, Brande.
- Intermission of ten minutes.

To conclude with the Comedy of
"THE SECRET, OR
THE HOLE IN THE WALL:"
By the Clinton Thespian Corps.

Dupuis, - - - -	Mr. J. Young.
Valare - - - -	Mr. J. A. Cambell.
Thomps, - - - -	Mr. H. A. Nicholls.
Porter, - - - -	Mr. S. H. Butler.
Mrs. Dupuis, - - - -	Mrs. Nicholls.
Angelica, - - - -	Miss Appleby.

Admittance, 18; Gentleman and two Ladies, 82
Children half price. H. A. NICHOLS,
jan3 Stage Manager.

Third Grand Concert of THE CLINTON TRIO CLUB.

This Club will give its Third CONCERT, (in lieu of
the Ball there will be other interesting performances.)

On MONDAY EVENING, Jan. 8th, 1855,
At the Sturges Saloon.

d27

H. A. NICHOLS, Manager.

of the dress circle, private boxes, painting new scenery, drop curtain, and all the other necessary alterations of the Stage and Hall, to bring out the play in the best style," the club scheduled the next performance for February 15. In the issue of January 17 the American Patriot was authorized to announce that "none but contributing members," would thereafter "be admitted to witness the performances. . . ."--a fact which indicated that the club was organized on a subscription basis and that Thespian Hall was probably very small.

In March the organization became known as the Clinton Shakespearean Society, and maintained a regular schedule of performances until July 4, the close of the spring season. During that period the society gave at least eleven programs from a known repertoire of seven different plays.

Although the Shakespearean Society produced no Shakespeare, it provided plays representative in variety and quality of the professional drama of the period. The serious plays included Lady of Lyons, Douglas, Don Caesar de Bazan, and Evadne, or the Hall of Statues; among their comedies and farces were Robert Macaire, The Toodles, The Dead Shot, The Omnibus, The Secret, or the Hole in the Wall, and Box and Cox. A check of theater bills for New York theaters during the spring of 1855 reveals the fact that the metropolitan theater audiences were seeing the same plays.⁴⁴

The achievement of the Shakespearean Society resulted in great measure from the devoted leadership and direction of Henry A. Nicholls,

⁴⁴ George C. D. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), VI, passim.

a Clinton watchmaker,⁴⁵ and his wife, the leading actress and costumer of the society. According to the lists of the various casts during the year of activity, ten men and four women, including the Nichollses, made up the acting corps of the amateur group. Nicholls was stage manager and director; moreover, since he was listed as treasurer of the society, it is likely that he assumed the additional duties of business manager. Samuel H. Butler was the scenic artist. He served as secretary⁴⁶ and appeared regularly among the casts. Other male members were J. Young, J. A. Cambell, J. K. Kedslie, Mr. Welsh, William Pinkney, J. Lea, C. Houston, and J. Sumner. Besides Mrs. Nicholls, Miss Appleby, Mrs. A. P. Butler, and Miss H. Nicholls assumed the feminine roles in the productions. Dr. J. S. Taylor, a Clinton physician, wrote an original prologue for the first production of the Thespian Corps.⁴⁷ Dr. Taylor frequently contributed prologue and epilogue lines. On every such occasion Mr. Young was the reader.

Two local musicians, Bernhard Moses and G. Rosenberger, were respectively the orchestral and vocal music directors of the Shakespearean Society.⁴⁸ Rosenberger was the vocal director of the Clinton Trio Club. Moses served also as music director for the semi-exclusive Harmonic Society, organized in June. The music club's expressed objective was ". . . the practice and performance of vocal and instrumental music, by those who understand music. The meetings were held every Thursday evening,

⁴⁵ Feliciana Democrat, August 11, 1855.

⁴⁶ Ibid., August 11, 1855.

⁴⁷ American Patriot, January 10, 1855.

⁴⁸ Ibid., January 3, 1855.

at Thespian Hall. . . ."⁴⁹ In addition to Moses and Rosenberger, who served as musical director and vocal leader, respectively, the officers of the Harmonic Society included Mrs. L. S. Lyons, president; Mrs. F. Hardesty, vice president; Miss Bythella Haynes, secretary; Mrs. Dunbar, treasurer; and Mrs. G. A. Neafus, librarian.⁵⁰ The group worked with the Shakespearean Society orchestra, and contributed materially to its later programs.

That the dramatic club experienced financial difficulties during the year was apparent. Evidently the society hoped to gain sufficient financial support to equip its theater and begin its program of performances from an advanced sale of subscriptions. After that, the sale of admissions to individual programs were believed to furnish operating expenses. Thus, the admission price of the first two performances in January was one dollar, with a gentleman and two ladies being admitted for two dollars. Apparently the number of subscribers had reached the seating capacity of the theater by February, and admittance was restricted to those patrons. Reports of the managing committee for a benefit performance given on June 19 for the fire department give some indication of the size of the theater. The firemen's committee advertised tickets at "\$1.50 each; no deduction for children--Number limited."⁵¹ The financial report by the firemen published after the performance furnishes a more precise estimate of the size of Thespian Hall; in addition it indicates the probable operating expense for individual productions by

⁴⁹ Ibid., June 9, 1855.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ American Patriot, June 16, 1855.

the amateurs, including printing, rent, lights, et cetera.

FIRE COMMITTEE'S STATEMENT

Messrs. Editors: The undersigned members of the committee for the sale of tickets respectfully request of you the publication of the annexed statement of the net receipts realized for aiding the purchase of a FIRE ENGINE, from the proceeds of the benefit given on Tuesday evening last by the enterprising members of the THESPIAN SOCIETY of the village, and for which they have richly earned the thanks, and future patronage of the community Henry Marston, M. G. Mills, G. A. Neafus, D. C. Hardee, J. M. Stokes, A. Levi.

STATEMENT: By receipts for the sale of 77 tickets		
.....		\$115.50
Paid G. W. Reese for printing	\$20.00	
Do Green & Dunn do	10.00	
Rent of Theatre, lights, music	14.90	44.90
Balance.		\$ 70.60 ⁵²

Thespian Hall probably had fewer than one hundred seats, since the seventy-seven ticket holders for the benefit performance made a "very large audience."⁵³

During the summer months members of the society planned to add new decorations, new stage equipment, and new costumes. For funds they repeated Evadne, the benefit play, on July 4. The play was not well attended.⁵⁴

In August the Clinton amateurs launched their subscription drive for the new season with the following detailed prospectus:

ADVERTISEMENT

THE THESPIAN SOCIETY OF CLINTON, intending to open for the Fall and Winter Season, invite all the lovers of the Drama in the Parish, to call upon the Treasurer, and add their names to the subscribers' list. It is the intention of the Society to open

⁵² Feliciana Democrat, June 30, 1855

⁵³ American Patriot, June 30, 1855.

⁵⁴ Feliciana Democrat, July 7, 1855.

with an entirely new play, new scenery, new music, &c.

The Society is complete in its formation and fully organized, and with the past experience and rapid improvement of the members in their several departments, it bids fair for the attainment of high excellence.

The Stage Manager has shown great energy and capability, the members of the Society are perfectly satisfied with his past management, and his arrangements for the future.

The Musical Director, is an accomplished composer and arranger of music. The gentlemen of the Orchestra have spared neither pains nor expense, in perfecting their instrumentations.

The Acting department, is well filled with gentlemen and lady members; whose past performances have shown decided talent, and who will be aided by new candidates for public favor.

The Scene Painter intends to surpass his former efforts, in new scenery, new drop curtain, &c.

The Costumer has prepared a fine wardrobe of splendid fancy costumes, of rich material and correct historical style.

The same good order and decorum will be maintained in the ensuing season.

The Society with their present and prospective advantages, having a large wardrobe, ten suits of scenery, their library replenished with a large stock of acting plays from New York, is enabled to offer great inducements to gentlemen and ladies to become contributing or acting members, as it is the object of the society to develop native talent,-- acting and musical. A few of the members, (founders of the society) having in the past season been obliged to sustain the heavy expense incidental to the establishment of the Drama in a place having no conveniences, or artists to assist, they were also obliged to perform all the labor of fitting up and decorating their hall, as well as preparing themselves as amateurs, for the stage; but they confidently hope, they will not be obliged to close their next season at a heavy pecuniary loss.

It is the intention of the society to open for the Fall and Winter season on the third Tuesday Evening in September, and to perform every two weeks.

For further information in regard to terms, &c., please call upon the Treasurer, Mr. H. A. Nicholls, Watch Maker, Clinton, or--S. H. Butler, Sec'y. 55

The summer renovating project at Thespian Hall took on such proportions as to cause postponement of the opening performance of the fall season from the third Tuesday in September to October 30. The results of the Thespians' work impressed one Clintonian: "This indefatigable Corps have at great labor, time, and expense, refitted their little Temple in magnificent style and in very good taste." Samuel H. Butler, the scenic artist, had redecorated the entire proscenium facade and had painted pastoral scenes in "gay colors" on the sides. Above the proscenium opening was a new ". . . chaste design-- the American flag borne aloft by the American Eagle, time--sunrise, little cherubs, earth bound, bear chaplets of flowers, night clouds and twinkling stars are disappearing at the approach of the Orb of day" Butler had painted new sets for garden, room, cottage, and palace scenes, making a total of ten different sets with which the society began the new season.

The amateur company gave some consideration to costumes, although few specific details appeared in reviews and other publicity. Their announcements frequently mentioned the fact that particular plays would have new costumes. Don Caesar de Bazan, as a single example, was dressed in "the old Castilian style."⁵⁶ Further, the prospectus for the new season indicated that the costumer, Mrs. H. A. Nicholls, prepared "a fine wardrobe of splendid fancy costumes, of rich material and correct historical style."

During 1855, the active period of the Thespian or Shakespearean Society in Clinton, reviews of the amateur productions said a great deal

⁵⁶ American Patriot, May 12, 1855.

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS.

For the Benefit of the Fire Department, OF CLINTON.

THE Shaskperean Society of Clinton will perform on

TUESDAY Evening, June 26, 1855,
for the Benefit of the Fire Department, the
beautiful play of

EVADNE, or the HALL OF STATUES.

Cast with the entire strength of the Thespian Company, with new scenery, costumes, &c.

King of Naples,..... S. H. Butler,
Ludovico, his Prime Minister, . J. K. Kedslie,
Colonna,..... J. Young,
Vicentio, H. A. Nichols,
Spalatro, J. Sumner,
Evadne,..... Mrs. H. Nichols,
Olivia, Miss Nichols.

Guards, Pages, Courtiers, &c.

Stage Manager, H. A. Nichols.

Act 1. Scene 1.—Palace of the King of Naples

Act 2, Scene 1.—Room in the King's Palace.


2.— “ “ Colonna's Palace.

Act 3. Scene 1.—Street in Naples.

Act 4. Scene 1.—Bay and view of Naples.

2.—A Prison.

Act 3. Scene 1.—Vast Hall in Colonna's Palace filled with statues. Grand tableaux.

 Tickets can be procured from any of the
committee. je 9

about the musical and acting talents of the performers. Comments following the first performance of the club observed simply that the group was composed exclusively of amateurs.⁵⁷ Only H. A. Nicholls merited personal mention. His Thomas (The Secret) was superior, the reviewer believed, to many professional characterizations of the role he had seen. The music was, however, in bad taste. It was good in "time" and "place," but the observer advised the orchestra not to attempt to interest the audience in operatic selections with so few instruments. Following the first program, which consisted of a comedy, an afterpiece, and interlude of vocal and instrumental music, the group began preparation of Lady of Lyons and the American Patriot immediately expressed a skeptical note concerning the ability of the group to give a creditable performance. ". . . We consider the personation of both Melnotte and Pauline as attendant with as many difficulties as any two characters in the English Drama." After their sixth program, however, when Robert Macaire was the play, the same editor was convinced of the acting talents among the Shakespeareans.

It has been proposed, and we think the suggestion a good one, that the company be invited to prepare themselves in rehearsal for the representation of that magnificent tragedy: Othello, or the Moor of Venice, for the benefit of the infant "fire department," and that seats for the occasion be sold at auction.⁵⁸

Mrs. Nicholls' Lady Randolph and Evadne brought many favorable comments. Following her portrayal of the latter role at the Firemen's

⁵⁷ Ibid., January 10, 1855.

⁵⁸ Ibid., April 21, 1855.

benefit in June, the Democrat editor observed that she

. . . is an actress of rare merit, great versatility of talent and most decided character. Her conceptions are good, her impersonations, chaste, her readings, excellent. When we consider the little time she can devote to the study of her representations, it adds an additional claim to our approval.⁵⁹

Nicholls played Norvel well but his "inimitable Thomas" showed him better suited to comedy than tragedy. Young, Kedslie, and Sumner were consistent performers; frequently reviews mentioned their work. Little was said of the other actresses. Concerning Mrs. A. P. Butler's debut as Olivia in Evadne in June, the Democrat editor observed that ". . . she is new, and as yet unused to the stage. Time, industry, patient study and observation will much improve her in every way. . . ."⁶⁰

The pocket diary of Henry W. Marsten, a contemporary Feliciana planter and jurist, contains references which suggest the over-all excellence of the Clinton amateur productions.

Tuesday (May) 22 . . . The Thespians performed the play of Don Caesar de Bazan and succeeded very well. . . .

Tuesday (June) 5 . . . The Thespians performed for 2 time the play of Don Caesar de Bazan--The merry Caulfields attended the theatre--& and were pleased. . . . Wednesday (June) 5 . . . John & Wm Caulfield left us much to our regret this morning for Wm. D. Caulfields on their way home to Liberty --May peace & happiness attend them

Tuesday (June) 26 . . . The Thespians performed for the benefit of the Fire Engine. . . .

Monday (December) 10 . . . Returned from Ruth's. Went to the Theatre--play passed off very well & house full--Firemen were present. . . .⁶¹

⁵⁹ Feliciana Democrat, July 7, 1855.

⁶⁰ Ibid., July 7, 1855.

⁶¹ Henry W. Marsten, Diary, 1855, Henry W. Marsten and Family Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

Visitors from neighboring towns who attended performances of the Clinton non-professional theater spread the reputation of the group. Baton Rouge citizens invited them to visit the state capital for appearances in July. The Clinton weekly announced that the society had accepted the invitation; however, no available information indicates that the club came to Baton Rouge. Varnado's survey of theatrical activities in Baton Rouge during that period does not mention such a performance. In December, both of the Clinton newspapers published a letter of invitation to the local theater group from the citizens of Woodville, Mississippi. The Patriot, in commenting on the December 27 performance of the Thespians, expressed the intention of the amateurs to visit the Mississippi town. ". . . The Thespians go to Woodville in a short time to play there."⁶² The local weekly reported nothing further concerning the proposed trip. Furthermore, the record of the Shakespearean Society's activities in Clinton ended with the performance of Douglas and the Irish farce The Omnibus on December 27, 1855. The American Patriot review was brief, reporting that

The Thespian Corps played on Thursday night to a pretty full house, not so full as it would have been had it not been for the inclemency of the weather.

The Tragedy of Douglas & the comedy of The Omnibus, were the pieces acted. The first was played well but the latter moved the risibles of the auditory to such an extent as to bring down continual thunders of applause and shouts of laughter from the whole house. . . .

Nicholls and Sumner gained particular mention for their acting in the farce.

The character of "Pat Rooney," the Irish servant

⁶² American Patriot, December 29, 1855

was ably sustained by Mr. Nicholls' usual tact, but we are constrained to say that "Thomas" played by Mr. Summer, is much the best character in the piece, and it was played in such a manner as to surpass anything of the kind we have yet seen from the Corps. Mr. Summer played his part as if he was in his native element, notwithstanding his short allowance of time for study, and at the conclusion both he and Mr. Nicholls were called before the curtain. . . .⁶³

In the following week's issue of the Feliciana Democrat a local supporter of the amateurs who signed her letter "Alba Rosa," criticized the Patriot reviewer on two points. First, he had lauded the male members of the amateur club without mentioning the feminine members; second, he had found more to praise in the farce than he saw in the more serious drama.

For the Feliciana Democrat.

Mr. Editor.--Will you permit a lady who wishes to make a few comments in regard to the Thespian Society of Clinton, to find a corner of your paper, and to notice an apparent slight, offered to one of her own sex--one who has graced our provincial boards, in a manner that would have done honor to the palatial establishments of our metropolis.

The Drama is one of the most instructive schools, a severe castigator of error, whether in private life, or seated on kingly thrones. . . .

But we did not sit down to eulogize the Drama, but to remonstrate with our excellent friend of "The Patriot," against such unfair treatment of our gentle sex, in noticing two of the gentlemen members of the Society, in laudatory terms, and skipping past the noble "Lady Randolph" and "Anna" without even a cold mention. What encouragement will be given to any other lady to become a devotee of "Thespis," when those who already so gracefully adorn the boards, are passed by, unnoticed by the supposed-to-be-manufacturers of public opinion--"the gentlemen of the Press"! We are gravely informed by the "Patriot" that

⁶³ Ibid.

--"The Tragedy of Douglass ^{/sig/} and the Comedy of The Omnibus were the pieces acted; the first was played well, but the latter moved the risibles of the auditory to such an extent, as to bring down thunders of applause, and shouts of laughter from the whole house." So, so, my patriotic friend, it is only necessary for our Thespian ladies and gentlemen to put on the "Fool's cap and bells" and play the buffoon to be appreciated in Clinton. While I love to laugh as well as any of your readers, I cannot admire the taste of the critic, who passes by without comment a splendid Five act Tragedy, with all its magnificent poetry, its beautiful delineations of character, and fine scenery, and throws his powers of criticism away upon a petty farce. . . .

ALBA ROSA. ⁶⁴

These final comments in the press concerning the choice of plays and the merits of the various performers were little more than expression of points of view and probably had no influence upon the sudden demise of Clinton's first non-professional theatrical group. The organization which had begun its energetic career twelve months earlier was the work of a small group of citizens of the town. Evidently many people subscribed to the Thespian Society as "contributing members"; it is equally evident that few subscribed as "acting members." The town liberally patronized the performances, but no evidence suggests that the people accepted the amateur theatrical club as a community enterprise. When H. A. Nicholls and Mrs. Nicholls, leaders of the theater group, moved away from Clinton early in 1856, probably because their financial standing in the community became threateningly embarrassing, too few of the people were sufficiently interested in the Shakespearean Society to attempt to sustain the organization.

⁶⁴ Feliciano Democrat, January 5, 1856.

Information contained in a civil litigation involving Henry A. Nicholls suggests the situation of the amateur theater director. On March 29, 1856, the Feliciana Democrat published the following court order:

SHERIFF'S SALE

The State of Louisiana, Parish of East
Feliciana, Seventh District Court No. 2561,
B. C. Comstock, Tutor vs. Henry A. Nicholls,
et al. . . .

Comstock, trustee for the estate of Alexander W. and Sarah L. Ripley, had sold at auction on January 9, 1855, "Lots No. Two and Three in Square No. Thirteen, with all the buildings and improvements thereon in the town of Clinton." Nicholls was the purchaser for sixteen hundred dollars, which sum was to be paid in four annual installments with interest at eight per cent. The trustee's petition to the Court declared that the first installment of four hundred dollars was due and unpaid. It declared further that

. . . the said Nichols [sic] has departed the Jurisdiction of your Honorable Court and the State of Louisiana so that no amicable demand can be made of him of the said amount now due Your petitioner brings this suit, and prays that the writ of seizure & sale may be directed to the Sheriff. . . .⁶⁵

Thus the Clinton watchmaker, who was successful in directing the Shakespearean Society through twelve months of applauded theatrical activity, had been less fortunate in managing his personal affairs.

Except for occasional concerts, a circus,⁶⁶ and a three

⁶⁵ Comstock, Tutor vs. Nicholls, Court Docket No. 2561, 7th Judicial District Court, State of Louisiana, East Feliciana Parish Court House, Clinton, Louisiana.

⁶⁶ Marston, op. cit., February 12, 1856.

performance engagement of the Riley Family, a professional Company,⁶⁷ there is no record of further theatrical activities in Clinton before the Civil War.

Group activities contributing to community amusements in the Florida Parishes before the Civil War included (1) recitals and cotillion balls sponsored by local music and dancing schools, (2) special anniversary celebrations, (3) literary and debating society programs, and (4) community theater society productions. Present information indicates that organized theatrical groups provided a comparatively small amount of entertainment. The St. Francisville Theatrical Association, formed during the winter of 1810-1811, was active for less than a decade. The Shakespearean Society of Clinton performed regularly from January to July and October through December, 1855, after which time the organization dissolved.

The two groups were similar in organization. (a) The St. Francisville Theatrical Association, governed by its adopted constitution, was directed by a president, secretary, and a music director. Two members of the acting corps served respectively as scenic artist and costumer for the Shakespearean Society. (b) Each of the organizations financed their activities by subscriptions. (c) Objectives of both groups were to provide entertainment for their respective communities and the Shakespearean Society proposed developing local music and acting talent as an added objective. (d) Both clubs equipped small theaters, neither of which was used by other organizations.

Clinton's Shakespearean Society achieved a relatively high

⁶⁷ Feliciana Democrat, March 7, 1857

quality in their productions: (a) plays were contemporary standard pieces in the professional theater; (b) actors included a small group of ten men and four women who worked in all productions; (c) the company scenic artist and costumer gave particular attention to the needs in staging individual productions. Present fragmentary information prevents an evaluation of the work done by the St. Francisville Theatrical Association.

Professional entertainers--lecturers, musicians, family groups in variety programs, circuses, and a dramatic troupe--performed frequently in St. Francisville and Clinton throughout the period. Among the places of amusement, used by both professional and miscellaneous community groups, were the ballrooms of local hotels, the courtroom of the parish courthouse in Clinton, and the market house in St. Francisville. Thus, the pre-war period-- one of establishment and growth among the communities of the Florida Parishes of Louisiana--was characterized by wide variety of amusements, produced on a limited scale by both professional and community organizations.

CHAPTER II

RED RIVER AREA

Natchitoches

When Timothy Flint was traveling and writing of the lower Mississippi Valley during the 1820's, he was especially attracted to two thriving villages on Red River in central Louisiana. Alexandria, seventy miles from the Mississippi, is situated at the mouth of Bayou Rapides half a mile below the falls and was in the center of the rich cotton planting country of Bayous Rapides, Robert, and Boeuf. Natchitoches, eighty miles above Alexandria, "by the meanders of the river," was at that time, according to Flint, the last town of any size towards the south-western frontier of the United States.¹

Alexandria in 1820 was a new community which had sprung up quickly, thriving on its agricultural products, lumber, and river commerce. It had a bank, a weekly newspaper, a number of stores, and respectable attorneys and physicians. Natchitoches, on the other hand, was already a century old, and its mixture of nationalities--"American, French, and Spanish, and . . . a sprinkling of Indian"--was picturesque and interesting from a different point of view. According to Flint's travelogue, the Spanish trade from the interior of the Mexican states centered at Natchitoches. Bars of silver, horses, and mules were exchanged for manufactured goods, groceries, spirits, and

¹ Timothy Flint, The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley, (Cincinnati: E. H. Flint, 1833) I, 270.

tobacco. The town had an exuberant and pleasant society. Flint's description of the social activities of the period and of times preceding his visit reveals a hodgepodge of backgrounds and traditions among the inhabitants.

. . . There are respectable families here; and the opulent planters have houses in town for the sake of society. The people are excessively fond of balls and dancing. . . . This place has experienced the successive regimes of the savages, the Spanish, French, and Americans, and has had its war dances, fandangoes, French balls, and American frolics. . . .²

Natchitoches was incorporated by act of the state legislature in February, 1819. The following month the people established the Academy of Natchitoches. The legislative act which incorporated the school decreed that ". . . it will be the duty of the school regents and their successors to administer the funds of the corporation. . . (and) to employ professors to teach the English and French languages"³ Mr. Muscarelli, the itinerant music and dancing teacher who had conducted schools and public recitals in St. Francisville and Jackson during April, 1825, opened a School of Music on March 8, 1826, and conducted classes at Hart's Hotel three nights each week. A week later he added a School of Dancing, conducting both schools simultaneously.⁴ A Catholic mission was established as early as 1765, and a convent was added soon thereafter. In 1839 Leonidas Polk, the noted Episcopal bishop, visited Natchitoches; by 1843 the Episcopal church was established.

² Ibid., p. 271

³ Louisiana Acts, 1819, pp. 96-98.

⁴ Bernaine Portre-Bobinski and Clara M. Smith, Natchitoches, (New Orleans: Dameron-Pierson Co., Ltd., 1936) p. 137.

These religious groups sponsored educational institutions for the community until the state school program added assistance shortly before the Civil War.⁵

Natchitoches had theater early in the nineteenth century, but dates of performances, who the performers were, or what patronage was given are little known. Hart's Hotel ballroom accommodated Muscarelli's music and dancing classes, and no doubt served for the frequent balls of the society of the town. A decade later Lascal's ballroom on St. Denis Street was a well-known place of entertainment.⁶ Regular drama was produced in a theater on Trudeauaux Street in 1839. Probably professional troupes which came to Natchitoches following brief engagements at Alexandria played there. Occasionally showboats which traveled up Red River entered Can River, the left branch, to reach Natchitoches for performances. William Toumey, the young Irish immigrant who came to Natchitoches in 1836 to practice his profession of law, made brief entries in his diary which indicate his great liking for the theater. On February 20, 1837, he "visited for the last time this season the Theater Steamboat."⁷ He had intended attending the "Musical Olio" at Lascal's ballroom on Saturday evening of April 14, 1838, possibly a musical concert arranged by local talent. The young lawyer spent some time during January the following year with his uncle in New Orleans where he went "every night" to the theater. He saw Ellen Tree, Edwin Forrest, the Ravel Family. In Natchitoches again on April 14 he "..."

⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

⁶ J. Fair Hardin and Phanor Breazeale, "A Young Lawyer of Natchitoches of 1836: The Diary of William S. Toumey," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XVII (1934) 74.

⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

went to the theater in Trudeauaux Street with Giles, E. Carr, Dr. Strong and Mr. More of Grand Ecore; play, 'Warlock of the Elms,' horribly mutilated; miserable performers. . . ." ⁸

Unfortunately the critic does not identify these inept actors. Had they been his friends of Natchitoches, he probably would have made some brief justification of their failure. Assuming them to have been an ill-equipped professional troupe on the frontier, and remembering the young lawyer's recent visits to the excellent New Orleans theaters, one may best accept Tounsey's comments as a frank comparative judgement.

A professional company from the St. Charles Theater in New Orleans, managed by T. B. Franklin, probably played in Natchitoches for a time during February, 1841. ⁹ Varnado's survey of theatrical activity in Baton Rouge reported T. B. Franklin's projected tour in September, 1840. The company was in Alexandria during January, 1841, and on February 6, the Red River Whig announced the close of the engagement and plans of the company to visit Natchitoches:

The Rapides Theatre closed for the season last evening, the performances being for the benefit of the manager, Mr. Franklin. We were gratified on seeing so many of our citizens present on the occasion. The company leave today for Natchitoches. We bespeak for them a hearty welcome.

Many of the other professional entertainers who traveled the Red River Route to Alexandria before the war probably continued to Natchitoches for performances.

Immediately before the Civil War the Natchitoches Philharmonic

⁸ Ibid., p. 318.

⁹ Alexandria Red River Whig, February 6, 1841.

Society was active. Jules Nores, the music teacher, was directing the group in 1861. On December 5 the society gave a two-part Grand Concert for the benefit of "our sick and wounded volunteers." The December issue of the Natchitoches Union reported that vocal and instrumental music composed the program and included selections of original work by members of the Philharmonic Society. The concert was held at the ballroom on St. Denis Street, probably the former Lascal's, and the admission price was one dollar. After a deduction of \$7.50 for various expenses, \$118 remained from the receipts for distribution to the needy volunteers.¹⁰ Of earlier activities of the Philharmonic Society in Natchitoches nothing is known. The span of twenty years between 1842 and the outbreak of the war, in fact, passes in this survey without record. It is suggested that community theatrical activity in Natchitoches during that period was similar in certain respects to the activities of other Louisiana communities more fully treated in the survey.

¹⁰ Natchitoches Union, December 10, 1861.

Alexandria

The plan for the town of Alexandria was plotted between 1805 and 1810 on a tract of land along the south side of Red River donated by Alexander Fulton, one of the early planters of Rapides parish. The village was chartered by the state legislature in 1818. The following year the town's first school, the College of Rapides, was incorporated.¹¹ By December, 1821, the young men had organized the Alexandria Thespian Association and were presenting regular theatrical entertainment to the citizens of the village.¹²

Settlers of the cotton plantations along Red River in central Louisiana were predominantly American, having migrated westward from the South Atlantic states and Alabama and Mississippi. As early as 1820 little language difficulty was experienced among the citizens of Alexandria. Those who were French soon acquired a speaking knowledge of English and public meetings and social activities were conducted in English. The Louisiana Planter, a weekly journal which began publication in Alexandria in 1810, was the first newspaper published in Louisiana outside New Orleans. Before 1820 two other weeklies were begun in Alexandria.¹³ In 1823 the business and professional men of the town organized the Alexandria Library Society and the state legislature granted the organization a charter in 1824.¹⁴ According to Whittington,

¹¹ G. P. Whittington, "Rapides Parish, Louisiana, A History," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XVI (1933) 437.

¹² Alexandria Louisiana Herald, December 1, 1821.

¹³ Whittington, op. cit., p. 438.

¹⁴ Louisiana Acts, 1824, p. 36-38.

all of the lawyers, doctors, office holders, and many merchants and planters were charter members. The association accumulated a library of some three thousand volumes of English and classical authors.¹⁵ Activities of a purely entertaining nature included balls and cotillion parties sponsored, especially during the winter months, by hotel proprietors and dancing school masters. Mr. Labadie conducted a dancing school in 1821 and gave weekly public performances.¹⁶ In October, 1826, Mr. Muscarelli moved down the river from Natchitoches to open schools of music and dancing in Alexandria and Cheneyville. His weekly cotillion parties were conducted in Cheneyville on Tuesday and in Alexandria on Friday evenings. According to his announcement, the entertainments were held at Captain Bailey's Tavern. Activities began at eight o'clock in the evening and ended precisely at twelve midnight. Gentlemen could secure tickets of the program director at the bar of Bailey's Tavern for two dollars.¹⁷

An enthusiastic celebration annually commemorated Independence Day in Alexandria. The activities of July 4, 1820, reviewed in the July 8 issue of the Louisiana Herald, indicate the patriotic zeal with which the entire village participated. The day dawned to the salute of artillery. From all sections of the parish people came by carriage, horseback, or on foot to assemble at the court house. At twelve o'clock noon Mr. Wilson read the Declaration of Independence, after which Mr. Oakley delivered an "appropriate" address. At three o'clock

¹⁵ Op. Cit., p. 439.

¹⁶ Louisiana Herald, November 24, 1821.

¹⁷ Louisiana Messenger and Alexandria Advertiser, October 20, 1826.

in the afternoon the gentlemen assembled at the Alexandria Coffee House for dinner. The group chose Col. Walter H. Overton to preside and John Casson, Esq., was appointed to assist him. After the feast a round of toasts, "interspersed with appropriate songs and cheers," were drunk. A program of twenty specific toasts was prepared, the first being to "The Day--let slaves celebrate the birth of tyrants; freemen the dawn of their civil and religious liberties." Six rousing cheers followed the toast. During the dinner the group proclaimed honors to the memory of Washinton; to the Constitution; to Education, Morality and Patriotism; to Agriculture, Commerce and Manufacture; to the Arts and Sciences; and to the Patriots of South America. Far down on the program was a toast to the "American Fair--While they reward with their smiles the efforts of the brave, may we never want means to support, the spirit to defend them." After the prepared script was finished, the occasion, the spirit of patriotism--the food and drink--inspired numerous impromptu toasts, toasts in addition to the twenty. Among the "volunteers" whose talents impressed the Herald editor were the day's president Colonel Overton, John Casson, Judge Bullard, Mr. Oakley, Mr. Rich, Captain Bailey.

In 1821 Alexandrians organized the Thespian Association. An article entitled "The Stage," in a September issue of the Louisiana Herald, provides the earliest evidence of community interest in the drama. The writer, identified simply as "FOOTE," presented a plea for the drama in the theater as a source of enjoyment and instruction for an enlightened public.

Amusements, when rational, instructive, and innocent, are worthy of consideration and deserving of encouragement. When the mind from its enjoyment is enlarge, manners refined, and taste improved, an important object is attained; and surely, when any species of amusements lead to these ends, it is entitled to the attention and favor of an

enlightened public. That dramatic compositions have ever been esteemed among the greatest efforts of human genius, and their exhibition on public stages countenanced and approved by many wise and good men in all ages, will be denied by few. By such they have been deemed highly serviceable to the cause of virtue. Nations have wisely blended instruction with pleasure, that while the fancy is captivated and the feelings excited, the understanding might be enlarged, the mind refined and exalted, and the heart made better. Knowing that men will not be barred from the pursuits of pleasure, their object has been, not to endeavor to deprive them of it, but to direct them through its dangerous paths to the most innocent, rational and instructive results. Hence most nations have judged it proper, both from political and moral motives, to institute some public exhibitions for the entertainment of the people; and, indeed, what entertainment, what pleasure so rational, as that which is afforded by a well written and well acted play, where the mind at once reaps both improvement and delight. . . .¹⁸

The writer continues at some length using historical and personal allusion in the same persuasive style to effect in the Herald readers a favorable attitude toward the drama. The essay in fact would seem better addressed to a more leisured society than that of this early nineteenth century agricultural community. "FOOTE" was probably the member of the Alexandria Thespian Association in charge of publicity, informing the public of the objectives of the organization and enlisting for it the patronage of the citizens.

The Alexandria Thespian Society advertised a program for December 6, 1821, the earliest information discovered concerning the new organization.

THESPIAN SOCIETY.

On Thursday Evening next, will be presented the celebrated Comedy of THE POOR GENTLEMAN; and

¹⁸ Louisiana Herald, September 29, 1821.

The amusing Farce, by Dibdin, called PAST 10 O'CLOCK & A RAINY NIGHT.

Doors to be opened at 5 o'clock, and the curtain to rise precisely at 6.

Admittance one dollar, children half price.--Tickets to be had at the tavern of R. G. Leckie, Esq., store of Sexton & Morgan, and at the store of Wm. Armstrong. By order of the managers.

WM. BEATTY, Jr. Tr.¹⁹

Of the members of the Thespian Society during the first season only Wm. Beatty, Jr., was identified in the newspaper notices. Young Beatty, the society treasurer, was also serving at the same time as secretary of Columbian Lodge No. 15 of the Masonic fraternity in Alexandria. On August 22 of the following year he married Miss Judith T. Leckie,²⁰ and his name appeared among the charter members of the Alexandria Library Society in 1824. The theater group maintained throughout the first season three places of ticket distribution: R. G. Leckie, hotel proprietor; Sexton & Morgan, retailers of general merchandise; and Wm. Armstrong, whose business is not further identified. Subsequent production announcements informed the theater patrons that no money for tickets would be accepted at the door.

The managers who directed Beatty to insert the notice in the advertising columns of the Herald probably consisted of the Thespian Association Officers, among them the association president, the stage manager, and possibly a music director. Carr and Boyle, two professional actors, appeared in the casts of the Thespian Association productions of February and March. During the previous May and June they had

¹⁹ Ibid., December 1, 1821.

²⁰ Ibid., August 24, 1822.

THESPIAN SOCIETY.

On Thursday Evening next,
(the 6th Dec.)

Will be presented the celebrated Comedy of

THE POOR GENTLEMAN;

And the amusing Farce, by Dibdin,
called

Past 10 o'clock & a Rainy Night.

Doors to be opened at 5 o'clock,
and the curtain to rise precisely at 6.

* * Admittance one dollar, children
half price.—Tickets to be had at the
tavern of R. G. Leckie, Esq store of
Sexton & Morgan, and at the store of
Wm. Armstrong.

By order of the Managers.

WM. BEATTY, Jr. Tr.

Dec. 1.

7

worked with the W. Jones Theater Company in Baton Rouge;²¹ they later formed a comedy team and toured together, having appeared at St. Francisville in December, 1821, offering a program of "songs and recitations." On February 19, 1822, Carr appeared in the role of Dennis Brulgruddery in the Alexandria Thespian production of John Bull, or The Englishman's Fireside. The farce of the evening was Turn Out; Carr played Gregory and Boyle appeared as Restive.²² Those guest actors were given a benefit on March 5, when the play was She Stoops to Conquer. Carr was the Tony Lumkin "with a song," and Boyle took the role of Mrs. Hardcastle. In addition to their roles in the Oliver Goldsmith comedy, Carr and Boyle were scheduled to appear as Justice Day and Tago respectively in the farce entitled The Honest Thieves, and to sing "Paddy Carry" and "The Light House," two of their song specialties, between plays.²³ Two programs during January included The School for Scandal with the farce called The Village Lawyer²⁴ and the comedy Education with The Irishman in London.²⁵ It seems likely that the Association gave other productions during February and even following the benefit in March for Boyle and Carr; however, the next appearance of the corps, according to the available record, was advertised for September 19, 1822, with Fashionable

²¹ Alban F. Varnado, A History of Theatrical Activity in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1819-1900. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1947, p. 2.

²² Louisiana Herald, February 9, 1822.

²³ Ibid., March 2, 1822.

²⁴ Ibid., January 12, 1822.

²⁵ Ibid., January 26, 1822.

Follies and 'Tis All a Farce.²⁶

During the following years the record of activities of the Alexandria Thespian Association is incomplete. The few issues of the weekly newspapers of the town which are preserved present little direct comment on the non-professional organization. In December, 1826, Mr. Muscarelli's cotillion party was postponed "owing to the performances in town."²⁷ It seems safer to assume that the performance causing the postponement of the dancing-master's program was by traveling players. Better planning of program dates would have seemed likely if the program managers had been Alexandrians. In 1833, however, the Thespian Association is known to have been giving regular performances.²⁸ The Rivals was one of the plays given during that season. In November, 1836, the theater group was known as the Alexandria Amateur Thespian Society. On November 17 the society produced again Goldsmith's comedy She Stoops to Conquer and the cast included Messrs. Shepherd, Gordon, Brown, Mackay, Dr. Crawford, Russel Curtis, Brewer, Wilmothe, Charlie Leckie, L. Bonicle, Bryce and Wood.²⁹

In the November 30, 1836, issue of The Intelligencer the Thespian Society announced details for their forthcoming performance on

²⁶ Ibid., September 7, 14, 1822.

²⁷ Louisiana Messenger and Alexandria Advertiser, December 15, 1826.

²⁸ Weekly Town Talk, December 13, 1890. In a digest of the January 1, 1833, issue of the Alexandria Gazette and Planters' Intelligence, a friend of Weekly Town Talk editor wrote: "A Thespian Company was then in active work here, and one of the plays was 'Comedy of the Rivals.'"

²⁹ (Mrs.) L. A. Armstrong, "Historical Information of Alexandria, Rapides Parish, Etc.," Weekly Town Talk, February 6, 1897.

December 1. The advertisement includes a complete cast of the two plays being played.

THEATRE!!

On Thursday evening, the 1st of December will be represented the amusing entertainment of

CATCHING AN HEIRESS

Capt. Poodle	Mr. Gordon
Capt. Killingly	Mackay
Mr. Gayton	Shepherd
Tom Twigg, or	
Baron Sowercroizensausengen	Dr. Crawford
Stubby	Mr. Sphon
Simpkins	Marschalk
Testy	Wilmoth
Mr. Smith	Bringinghurst
Caroline Gayton	Mr. C. Legkie
Sally Giggie	Boissat <u>/sic/</u>

After WHICH

The Living Statues by Mr. Marschalk

to conclude with the laughable Farce of

THE MOCK DOCTOR

Gregory	Dr. Crawford
Sir Jasper	Mr. Brown
Leander	Mackay
Harry	Marschalk <u>/sic/</u>
James	Curtis
Suire <u>/sic/</u> Robert	Brewer
Davy	Wilmoth
Dr. Hellehore <u>/sic/</u>	Bringinghurst
Dorcas	Mr. Sphon
Charlotte	Boniol <u>/sic/</u>
Maid	Boissat <u>/sic/</u>

Tickets may be had at any of the Taverns, or of Mr. Bringinghurst, Secretary. Admission, \$1--Children half price.

Front seats reserved exclusively for the ladies. Doors

³⁰ The Actor was probably a member of the Boissat Family who settled in Alexandria in 1816. Eugene R. and H. A. Boissat, publishers of the Louisiana Democrat of Alexandria, were active in non-professional theater during the period of Reconstruction.

open at 6 o'clock, P. M. --Curtain rises at 7.
For further particulars, see small Bills.

A final reference to the activity of members of this early Alexandria theater group appeared in 1841. Mrs. Irwin, who had worked with a professional troupe earlier, was to take a benefit. The weekly newspaper announced that "several of the Amateurs have tendered their services to assist this deserving lady on the occasion. The tragedy of the Apostate, with a new and amusing farce have been selected. . . ." ³¹

With present information the leaders of the Thespian society cannot be pointed out. Names of families established in Alexandria and Rapides parish appeared in the casts. Mr. Bringham, the secretary of the 1836 thespians, was a teacher. Dr. James A. Crawford, associated with Dr. M. Mahony, was a physician and surgeon who had studied and practiced his profession "both in Europe and the United States." ³² L. M. Shepherd served on occasion as auctioneer for the E. H. Flint & Company, ³³ and the Hon. H. Boyce was an attorney. The Blossat family came from France to Louisiana early in the century and settled in Alexandria in 1816. ³⁴ Two sons, Eugene R. and H. A. Blossat, became "General Commission and Forwarding merchants & Steam Boat Agents" ³⁵ and later entered journalism, publishing the Louisiana Democrat. In 1858 Eugene R. Blossat was treasurer of Rapides parish. Following the Civil War the brothers continued publication of the weekly newspaper, during

³¹ Red River Whig, May 8, 1841.

³² The Intelligencer, November 30, 1836.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Louisiana Democrat, December 8, 1880.

³⁵ Red River Whig, October 2, 1841.

which time H. A. Blossat was active in non-professional theater in Alexandria.

Except for Mrs. Irwin's benefit program, it is significant to note, all plays chosen for production by the Alexandria Thespian Association were comedies. For the most part they were plays known for both literary and theater values. Only men participated in the productions. Charlie Leckie, Blossat, and Boniole were the actors most frequently assigned to play the feminine roles. Of the theater nothing is known. Of scenery, costuming, even the acting no information is available. Continued activities of the Thespian Association suggests that the over-all quality of productions was sufficient to attract an encouraging patronage from the citizens of the community.

A professional theater company came to Alexandria during the winter of 1840-1841. Under the management of a T. B. Franklin, the company played an undetermined number of weeks at what was referred to as the Rapides Theater. Among the plays were William Tell, King Lear, Lady of Lyons, Rob Roy, Hamlet, The Wife, and Bertram, with Addams (or Adams) as tragedian. Franklin, Mrs. Irwin, Mrs. Caulfield, and Hubbard were supporting actors mentioned in the weekly commentary of Whig.³⁶

A variety of professional theatrical entertainment favored Alexandrians during the following years. T. W. Tanner, showman of Herculean feats, his son, at nine the "greatest Contortionist in the world," and Joe Rice, comedian, performed in May, 1844.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., January 23, 30, February 6, May 8, 15, 1841.

³⁷ Southern Transcript, May 8, 1844.

Stickney's Grand National Circus entertained the parish on May 24, 25, and 26, 1848,³⁸ the first of a series of circuses which came to Alexandria during the following months. Included in the group were the Mammoth Double Circus, Stone & McCollum's Great Western, Spalding & Rogers, and the great E. F. & J. Mabie Circus.

Miss Morton, a concert Violinist, gave performances at the Rapides parish court house on February 15 and 17, 1851;³⁹ and Mr. H. Barum, publicised as a former violincello soloist in the Jenny Lind Orchestra, gave a concert at the Alexandria Odd Fellows Hall on August 18, 1853.⁴⁰ J. S. Charles and his company opened a series of performances at the Rapides Theater in January, 1861, continuing until late in March. John Davis, the stage manager for the troupe, his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Rea, and Mr. Sherry appeared in the casts. Madame Dausi Housman of the New Orleans French Opera appeared on the program of February 16, at which time Isabelle! or Woman's Life was performed.⁴¹ Commenting in the February 9 issue, the Constitutional editor praised the preceding week's performances of the company in Othello, Richard III, and Rob Roy. There had been excellent audiences, and the reviewer concluded his comments with a suggestion to the town council.

. . .As the amusements at the Theatre are of a literary character, and of especial benefit to our community, and as nearly all the funds collected are spent in our city, would suggest to the consideration of the "City Fathers" the propriety of not

³⁸ Red River Republican, May 13, 1848.

³⁹ Ibid., February 15, 1851.

⁴⁰ Ibid., August 13, 1853.

⁴¹ The Constitutional, February 16, 1861.

charging any license for these exhibitions.

A month later the company announced a benefit for Mrs. Davis. Macbeth was chosen for the performance with Mr. and Mrs. Davis acting the tragic leads and Master T. Davis and Little Julia, the Davises' children, appearing as the apparitions. For an afterpiece the company chose Children in the Wood.

Although their entertainments cannot be considered theater in a strict sense, citizens of Alexandria provided a variety of amusements for the community during the period immediately preceding the Civil War. Ladies of Alexandria sponsored a Fair at the Washington Hotel on February 23, 1847. Great credit for the success of the event was expressed for the ladies whose "handiwork contributed to the artistic displays" and for the hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Hester of the Washington Hotel.⁴² The Episcopal Church sponsored a similar event in May, 1853. The church fair was held at Odd Fellows' Hall, and the receipts were "upward of \$900."⁴³

The Sons of Temperance were established in the parish by 1847 and their lectures and festivals gave frequent opportunity group meetings. Holiday balls were gorgeous affairs. May Day, Independence Day, the anniversaries of Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, the Battle of New Orleans, and Washington's Birthday were important dates for Alexandrians. Leading planters and professional men of the vicinity made up the committees and managers of elaborate festivities, and the ladies and gentlemen of

⁴² Red River Republican, February 6, March 13, 1847.

⁴³ Ibid., May 7, 14, 1853.

the parish were participants. Balls were held at the Washington Hotel ballroom, described as "one of the most beautiful in the state out of New Orleans."⁴⁴

The scattered Indian tribes occasionally engaged in their traditional game of Indian Ball Play. One tribe would send forth a challenge, arrange with one of the planters for a suitable site for an arena, and on an appointed day agreeable to the two participants the contest would take place. Preceding the day of combat the news was spread through the parish and great numbers of the citizens would assemble. An Alexandria journalist gave a descriptive setting of one such spectacle in the summer of 1848:

INDIAN BALL PLAY.

Every once in a while the Choctaws and Boloxis have a Ball Play in the Bayou Boeuf Pine Woods, about six miles from Carnal's bridge on the bayou, in the direction of the Pine Woods residence of W. C. C. Martin, Esq. The parties take a great deal of interest in the play, especially the women of the respective tribes, who bet ribbons, beads, frocks, petticoats, &c.--sometimes everything they have, and occasionally become so excited that they get to fighting. The men seldom get angry, although they frequently throw each other down with great violence. Their last play came off on Sunday last, when the game, which was well contested, was won by the Boloxis, making the second time they have beaten their opponents. There is to be another play on Saturday next, the main stake being a Beef, which the neighbors are to give the victors. The dexterity with which the Indians use the racket, and their agility and fleetness, is truly astonishing, and those who have never seen them at this game, should attend on the occasion, as it is well worth seeing.⁴⁵

During the late spring and summer months horse racing gained

⁴⁴ Ibid., January 4, 1851.

⁴⁵ Ibid., June 24, 1848.

much attention as an outdoor sport. From 1823 Alexandria had its Jockey Club. Young men took seriously their horsemanship abilities. Races were open to all who could pay the entrance fee, and the spectators were participants with their money on the line.

The Rapides Amateur Ethiopian Serenaders, a minstrel troupe, was active in Alexandria during the spring of 1850. A program of the group scheduled for March was advertised as "one of the inimitable Concerts," and listed a personnel of "Mr. Caesar, Accordion; Mr. Snowball, Guitarist; Mr. Green, Congo Cambo; Mr. Squash, 1st Violin; Mr. White, Chimes; Mr. Ledgerlip, Jawbonian; Mr. Ginger, Bones."⁴⁶ From this mixture of stage and real names, it is possible to assume that Mr. White may have been R. H. White, and Alexandria dancing master,⁴⁷ possibly a prime mover of the organization. The first two parts of the program were made up of characteristic minstrel repertoire, featuring alternately the members of the band as soloists supported by the troupe. The third part of the program, however, was largely original. Many of the titles suggested a take-off motif, lightly satirizing local and state events and individuals well known among the audience. This part of the program, for example, began with the "Grand Rail Road Overture (which has positively and unequivocally and categorically driven into retirement all the oder overtures of de day.)" Swain Ledgerlip sang "My Lona Lub," and the "Dr. Jim Crow Polka" was featured by Caesar with his accordion. Mr. Green burlesqued the dance of "Lucy Long" in costume, and the program concluded with the

⁴⁶ Ibid., February 23, 1850.

⁴⁷ Ibid., April 15, 1840.

"laugh provoking and science killing lecture on Phrenology and Mesmerism, by de very learned Doctor Clem Green, B.B." The program was held in the Washington Hotel ballroom, and a gentleman and lady were admitted for fifty cents. Single gentlemen paid the same admission fee.

Composition and arrangement of the program indicate that the Seranaders had apt leadership. The entertainment was advertised as "one of their inimitable Concerts," which fact suggests that the organization had previously performed before audiences of fun-loving Alexandrians.

On June 8, 1850, the Washington Hotel, Alexandria's chief place of amusement, burned in a fire which swept through the business district of the town.⁴⁸ Early in 1851 the Republican reported great progress in the rebuilding, noting particularly new buildings already completed; among them was "the fine brick house" of R. Chew, Esq., next to which was to be built "a fine hotel."⁴⁹ In 1852 Mr. Ariail completed the Ice House, designated as "perhaps the greatest enterprise. . . ." that had been "undertaken in this town. . . ."⁵⁰ The

⁴⁸ Ibid., June 10, 1850.

⁴⁹ Ibid., February 1, 1851.

⁵⁰ Ibid., March 6, 1852. The hotel built in connection with the Ice House, or adjacent to it, and known as the Ice House Hotel was managed by Joseph Fellows until about the close of 1858. During 1859 a new Ice House Hotel and Ice Depot was constructed. It was in the ballroom of the new building that James S. Charles fashioned the Rapides Theatre which he opened with a new company of actors on April 10 or 11, 1860. The Charles advertisement in the issue of Wednesday, April 11, of the Louisiana Democrat read: "RAPIDES THEATRE!! ICE HOUSE HOTEL. J. S. CHARLES, MANAGER. This splendid establishment will open for the Spring Season THIS EVENING. Wednesday, April 11th. . . .The Theatre is handsomely decorated and brilliantly lighted with Gas." Reviewing the theater activity the following week, the Democrat editor reported that Charles with his company ". . . formally inaugurated. . . ."

"enterprise" included the Ice House Hotel, the predecessor of the hotel which contained the Alexandria Thespian Association theater during the period of Reconstruction.

During the first half century of its existence, Alexandria developed into the important agricultural and shipping community in central Louisiana. Its churches, schools, fraternal organizations, its library association, its non-professional theater contributed much toward the recreation of the citizens and their cultural growth. The Alexandria Thespian Association was active in December, 1821, and continued, at least during certain intervals, until 1841. Their programs consisted usually of a full-length play and a one-act farce, with variety of intra-act specialty. Many of their plays were eighteenth century English comedies. Young men of prominent families of the community composed the membership of the amateur organization, three of whom are known to have played the feminine roles in their productions. That their organization continued over a period of approximately two decades indicates that their performances attained a degree of excellence sufficient to merit the patronage of the community. In 1841 a troupe of

the Rapides Theatre ". . . on Tuesday evening last, with a moderately numerous audience to help him. Since then, five performances have been given to very respectable houses. . . ." On April 12 Charles L. Doll, a local music teacher, assisted by Prof. Matheo, celebrated guitarist, and a group of Alexandria amateurs--T. P. Bundy, George Comer, P. E. Borbes, H. Biester, and J. M'Evoy--gave a concert at ". . . the NEW ICE HOUSE HOTEL. . . ." (Louisiana Democrat, July 3, 1859; March - April 1860, passim.)

The building escaped the great fire of 1864, and the theater was used by the Alexandria Thespian Association from 1868 to 1870, after which time, under a new management as the Exchange Hotel, it catered again to visiting professional theatrical troupes. (Louisiana Democrat, July 12, 1865; June 20, 1866; January 16, 1867; August 12, 1868; January 27, 1872.)

professional actors, managed by T. B. Franklin, played the first extended engagement by a professional troupe in Alexandria. James S. Charles managed other professional troupes in brief engagements in 1857 and 1860. Lecturers, concert musicians, minstrel troupes, and circuses provided a variety of professional theatrical entertainment during the period. In 1850 an amateur minstrel troupe was active, and throughout the period frequent dancing school recitals, public balls, and holiday celebrations evinced the health and gaiety of the community.

Cheneyville

A short distance to the south of Red River on Bayou Boeuf settlers from South Carolina established the farming village of Cheneyville about 1810.⁵¹ The Cheneys, Staffords, Roberts, Tanners, Turnbulls, Jacksons, and Fords were among the early families. Situated only about twenty-five miles south and east from Alexandria, Cheneyville citizens traded with the larger village, subscribed to Alexandria weeklies, shared the time of their itinerant music and dancing masters and lecturers. On the other hand, the little farming community established its own churches--Baptist as early as 1816--schools, and fraternities. Labadie and Muscarelli conducted dancing classes in Cheneyville and directed the weekly cotillion parties for the patrons on days they were not engaged in Alexandria.

Independence Day was celebrated according to a resolution of the citizens of Cheneyville in 1853. The meeting was held at Odd Fellows Hall for the reading of the Declaration of Independence, and Rev. C. C. Preston was invited to be the Orator of the Day. A cold supper was arranged, after which followed a ball. The committee who directed activities included L. A. Stafford, William H. Scott, L. A. Robert, Jr., Capt. D. M. Callihan, E. M. Wells, H. M. Keary, Col. T. J. Wells, Walter Bailey, C. L. Pearce, Dr. Slaughter, V. Gould, and James A. McWaters.⁵²

⁵¹ Whittington, op. cit., p. 254.

⁵² Alexandria Red River Republican, July 2, 1853.

On October 4, 1860, the ladies of the Episcopal Church held a fair, which was followed on the evening of October 5 by a dramatic program of Tableaux-Vivants.⁵³ The events took place in the Randon House Hotel and netted the managers more than \$1200. Joel Sandoz, founder and publisher of the Opelousas Courier, was a guest at the Cheneyville Fair. His descriptive narrative of the event, preserved in the October 13 issue of the Courier, reviews the theatrical program and reflects vividly the gaiety and facility with which rural Louisianians blended business and pleasure.

THE CHENEYVILLE FAIR

Learning that the ladies of the Episcopal Church of Cheneyville would hold a fair on the evenings of the 4th and 5th instant, for the commendable purpose of raising funds to complete, paint, and furnish their Church, we left home on the 3rd, in order to be in time to see the fair. Through much tribulation, across the prairies, over the Chicot hills, and through the Crocodile swamps, we succeeded in hauling up at the Randon House, just as night closed in on the evening of the 4th.

Lights are in all parts of the hotel, and W. H. Simons, some pumpkins of a Bonniface, stands at the threshold, superintending all things at once in a hurry, but accomplishing nothing very rapidly. While servants are running hither and thither in confusion, our attention is drawn to a transparency, hung to a china limb across the street. We are not connoisseurs in the fine arts, but, we think, this work would win for the painter an immortality of fame. Our feeble powers of description are inadequate to the task of giving our readers a just conception of its merits, still it shall not be passed by in silence. The painting is in ink colors, on coarse domestic nailed to a square frame. Towards the top of one side of the square is an eagle or a buzzard-bird--impossible to determine which--underneath that, in tolerably legible [sic] letters, but of unequal size, are the words "To The Ladies Fair," underneath these words are two whales coming full tilt at each other with their mouths [sic] wide open; another side represents a

⁵³ Opelousas Courier, October 13, 1860.

ehubby Indian girl gaudily dressed and crowned with eagles feathers, shooting a bow left-handed, holding the string near the top of the bow, far from where the arrow is attached; on another is the word "cheneyville" above a spotted horse or a zebra in full speed; last, but not least, we have an independent looking darkie smoking a huge pipe, with a big dog or an elephant trotting leisurely before him. The symbolic purpose of all these things we were unable to divine. . . .

During the time we have been making these observations, muddy carriages and buggies, drawn by tired horses, have been rolling up to the gate and pouring out their precious loads of elegant forms and fair faces. . . . A few pedestrians are cautiously wending their way to the scene of attraction. . . . We will shake mud from our habiliments, wash the dirt from our eyes, and take a peep into the room where woman's taste and skillful hands make it a delight and a pleasure to be benevolent.

. . . The gaze of the beholder is arrested by the ladies and flowers, the natural production of Rapides, here gathered in one array of loveliness and beauty; but art has helped nature to deck both in their most winning attire, and arrange them in fitting order. On either hand are tables handsomely decorated and well supplied with articles for sale. We will turn to the left and take one tour around the room.

The first table is a little democratic in appearance, being ornamented with a buck's horns, with foil and evergreen to set them off. There are many nice things here to tempt the buyer and charm the sight, but the loveliest flower of all is the Rose behind the table. Next is the post office beautifully decorated, and kept by one who is sure to have a letter for you by the next arrival of the mail. Gazing towards the other end of the room, we can but notice that "the twin widows" are placed opposite each other, the one with news, the other with refreshments; both ready for customers and well patronized. We now come to a table covered with babies' bonnets, slippers, shirts, toys, etc., which seems to be carrying on a cash business, where everything is done piercingly well. Again we come upon needle work, flowers and toys, menos yo no quiere ninguna and pass on.

At a corner table we find something to

eat and take a segar.--Next, " I scream" and pass on to More baby clothes, needlework, toys and flowers. We take a look at a stereoscope and have made the grand rounds, and will walk out and "smile."

The fair merchants drove a lucrative trade until supper was announced, when all repaired to the dining room and partook of a sumptuous repast. After supper, a snatch or two at the grab bag, a little raffling, and a little auctioneering and the fair for the evening is over.

The cash sales added up over a thousand dollars, and all dispersed, well pleased with themselves and the rest of mankind. . . .

At eight o'clock the following evening, the narrative related further, the curtain of the Randon House stage lifted to soft music revealing the first tableaux, the children of the neighborhood ceremonially crowning the Queen of May. The program of tableaux presented a variety of subjects--some depicting history, treating nature, repeating stock stage situations. A rough balance of the serious and the comic carried through the entertainment; its effectiveness evidently resulted from a thoroughly rehearsed pantomime routine with alternating character groupings.

John Smith as a prisoner, Pocahontas saving his life, Elizabeth granting Raleigh the Charter; January and May, Night and Morning; the fortune teller, a game of chess, and a visit from the poor relations indicate the scope of subjectmatter. Capt. Robert Davis, Lem Pierce, Chas. Bradford, Love Burgess, and Jeff. Wells; Mrs. Sallie G. Holmes, Mrs. Keary, Mrs. Mary D. Rhodes, and Misses Lizzie Wells, Rose and Betty Tanner, Ellen Wells, and Ella Dowe made up the corps of actors. The local band, evidently composed of stringed instruments, provided interludes of music. Following the performance the guests had supper; then a short auction, to dispose of articles remaining from the previous

day; and the Cheneyville Episcopal Church fair ended. The remainder of the night was a time of dancing in the Randon House Ballroom.

On the whole, community amusements in Natchitoches, Alexandria, and Cheneyville in the Red River area differed little from those in the Florida Parishes during the pre-war period. Dancing and music school recitals and anniversary celebrations were prominent. Although there is no record of literary and debating societies, a regularly formed amateur dramatic society, a minstrel company, and a music organization contributed materially to community entertainment. The Thespian Society of Alexandria, established in 1821, maintained an active organization until about 1841. Amateur musicians in Natchitoches were giving public programs in 1836, and the group formed the Natchitoches Philharmonic Society prior to the outbreak of the war. The Rapides Amateur Ethiopian Serenaders, a minstrel company, was entertaining Alexandrians during 1850. A church-sponsored program of Tableaux-Vivants in Cheneyville in 1860 was the earliest program of that type, which was very popular following the Civil War, to be given in the Red River area.

Available information indicates that elected officers of the Alexandria Thespian Society governed the group and directed its activities. Wm. Beatty, Jr., secretary during 1821-1822, and Mr. Bringham, secretary in 1836, handled ticket sales. Patrons bought tickets in advance at stated places of distribution among Alexandria business establishments. The price of admission was one dollar, and the Thespians accepted no money at the theater. The group restricted its membership to male citizens; therefore, certain of the young men

specialized in acting feminine roles. Two professional actors worked in Thespian Society productions during February and March, 1822, one of whom played feminine roles. The Alexandria Thespian Society held two apparent objectives: to provide entertainment for the community and to maintain an outlet for the worthwhile use of their own leisure time. Each program consisted of a full-length play, a farce, and a variety of interlude numbers. Plays by Goldsmith, Sheridan, and Molière were prominent in the Thespian's repertoire; thus, the continued activity of the organization and its choice of plays provide the chief bases for evaluating the quality of their productions. Local hotel ballrooms, the parish courthouse, and Odd Fellow's hall were the principal places for community-sponsored amusements during the pre-war period; frequently individual professional performers presented programs in these rooms. The place used as a theater by the Thespian Society cannot be identified.

Natchitoches and Alexandria had a greater professional theater activity than St. Francisville and Clinton in the Florida parishes during this period. In addition to the one and two evening appearances of concert musicians, lecturers, gymnasts, and circuses, regularly formed theatrical companies played extended engagements. By 1839 professional entertainers had established the Trudeaux Street Theater in Natchitoches; the Franklin Company opened the Rapides Theater in Alexandria during the winter of 1840-1841. Although there is no record of an amateur performance in the Rapides Theater, it continued to serve professional companies until 1861.

CHAPTER III

THE BAYOU COUNTRY

South Louisiana remained predominantly French during the first half of the nineteenth century. Early settlers made their homes along the Lower Mississippi River, south from Baton Rouge, along Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche, the principal waterways affording them communication with the Gulf and New Orleans. During the years of the territory period and early statehood English speaking people invaded the area in increasing numbers. These were made up principally of individuals connected with the government and planters who envisioned fortunes in the developing sugar industry.¹

Although both English and French languages were used in legal proceedings and business dealings, French was used almost exclusively in social intercourse. In only a few instances do the villages of the Bayou Country figure in this survey of non-professional theater before the Civil War. Plaquemine and Donaldsonville on the Lower Mississippi; Thibodaux on Bayou Lafourche; and Franklin, New Iberia, Grand Coteau, and Opelousas in the area of Bayou Teche, were among the important cultural centers following the war whose English and French speaking populations had sufficiently blended to afford a degree of joint

¹ Lyle Saxon, Old Louisiana, (New York: The Century Company, 1929, Chapter X. Reproduced here is the memoir of Judge Thomas C. Nicholls whose father, Edward Church Nicholls, was the first Civil commandant and United States Judge of the County of Attakapas in Louisiana. His family joined him near New Iberia on the Tech in 1805. The memoir, written in 1840 after Thomas had become a District Judge, recounts vividly the language difficulties encountered by his family among the French people, and reveals some of the social gaiety which the early settlers experienced at weekly balls and frequent musical soirées.

social activities. Non-professional theater history in the area remains obscure since few of the early newspapers are preserved.

LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Plaquemine

Plaquemine, in Iberville parish, is situated on the west bank of the Mississippi at the mouth of Bayou Plaquemine. Besides its central location among great sugar plantations, Plaquemine early became important in lumber products. The town was incorporated by act of the state legislature in 1846.² In February, 1855, a number of young gentlemen of the town organized themselves into a Debating club "in connection with the Lyceum," and received from the editor of the weekly Southern Sentinel a week later his encouraging support.³ Both English and French plays were presented at the commencement of the Plaquemine Convent in August, 1860. The English play, Effects of Disobedience, had "an amusing and well adapted performance." Les Deux Filles Adoptives was the second play and, according to the editor, was equally well received and as well performed, "as far as our observation and knowledge of the language enabled us to judge. . ."⁴

The newly organized Amateur Creole Band of Plaquemine serenaded the community for the first time in November. M. J. Bonning, the Plaquemine music teacher, was the leader.⁵

Plaquemine had at least occasional visits from professional theatrical troupes who passed on the way up and down the river. The

² Louisiana Acts, 1846, No. 158, pp. 144-148.

³ Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, March 3, 1855.

⁴ Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, August 25, 1860.

⁵ Ibid., November 17, 1860.

Christy Minstrels arranged a one-night performance in July, 1855.

Harry McCarthy, the Irish mimic, was scheduled for "Personation Concerts!" on April 8 through the 10, 1861.⁶

Donaldsonville

Donaldsonville, some twenty miles south of Plaquemine, was once designated as the state capital, and the state general assembly met there in 1830. William Donaldson had founded the town in 1806 on the west side of the Mississippi where Bayou Lafourche branches away to the south. The people of Donaldsonville provided amusement for themselves from an early time, and theater was one variety of that entertainment. Performances by a company of actors from the St. Charles Theater in New Orleans early in 1838 provided the earliest regular drama known to have been presented in Donaldsonville. The Donaldsonville Advocate, quoted in the May 25 issue of the Clinton Louisianian, reported that "Our little village has been for the last several evenings cheered by the exhibitions of a company of actors from the St. Charles Theatre, New Orleans. . . ." The company, apparently touring among south Louisiana towns, played for a week in Clinton beginning on May 28. The Fifteenth Legislature in its second session in March, 1842, passed an act incorporating the

⁶ Ibid., April 6, 1861. Harry McCarthy came to America from England, making his first theatrical appearance in Philadelphia in 1849. He became one of the most important figures in the theatrical activity of the Confederacy. Gaining his popularity as an impersonator of Irish Comedy characters and as a singer of popular ballads, McCarthy is credited with introducing the popular Confederate ballad, the "Bonnie Blue Flag," during an engagement in New Orleans during August, 1861. (See Iline Fife, The Theatre During the Confederacy, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1949. pp. 79-91.)

subscribers of the Donaldsonville Théâtre des Variétés.⁷ Dr. Sabin Martin, Victor Joubert Pujos, Jules Landry, Jules Goudrau, and Thomas Nicholls became the first directors of the theater by provisions of the act of incorporation. It is uncertain whether an organized non-professional theater group in Donaldsonville motivated the building of the new theater in 1842. The project may have been a means of encouraging theatrical companies from New Orleans to perform more regularly. Early activities were no doubt in French, as the following advertisement from an 1846 issue of the Donaldsonville weekly indicates:

THÉÂTRE DES VARIÉTÉS
DONALDSONVILLE 19 JUILLET 1846
La Jeune CREOLE, Ou LE TUTEUR DE VINGT ANS.
L'AUMONIER DU Regiment⁸

The following year the Salle de Donaldson was in use as a concert hall. M. F. Kroll, the Donaldsonville music teacher and composer, advertised his concert of original and classical compositions for September 16, 1847. The concert was followed by a Grand Bal Pare. Admissions were priced at one dollar for adults and fifty cents for children. Preceding the entertainment tickets were on sale at the "Cafes de MM. Isidore Lafargue et Vileor Dugas et au magasin de M. Achille Richard."⁹ Mrs. A. Brooks directed an entertainment at the Donaldson Room on October 19. Her notice in the October 16 issue of the Vigilant described the proposed evening's activities as a "Grand Bal D'Enfans /sic/." The children's program began at six o'clock,

⁷ Louisiana Acts, 1842, No. 83, pp. 196-198.

⁸ The Vigilant, July 16, 1846.

⁹ Ibid., September 11, 1847.

and "cela des grandes personnes" at ten. Early in 1850 Vileor Dugas announced the beginning of a series of weekly balls to which ladies were admitted free and "Cavaliers" secured tickets for one dollar.¹⁰

That Donaldsonville had theater during the late years of the pre-war period is evident. James S. Charles, a popular comedian and theater manager in New Orleans and in rural communities in Louisiana after 1850, was in Donaldsonville during the summer of 1858.

We perceive by the Drapeau, of Donaldsonville, that Mr. James S. Charles, the excellent artist who had got up a theatrical troupe in our Town, some 3 years ago, is now performing in Donaldsonville, with some of his old artists to whom he has added some others. Miss Grace Greenwood and Mrs. Alfreda are spoken of very highly by the paper above mentioned, the latter more particularly. The troupe will be in St. Martinsville [sig] about the end of August, and we hope then to see them here, where they may expect encouragement from our community.¹¹

BAYOU LAFOURCHE

Thibodaux

A little more than thirty miles down Bayou Lafourche from Donaldsonville, Thibodaux was plotted on land purchased by Henry Schuyler Thibodaux in 1822. Territorial justice of Lafourche County had been administered from this locality since 1808; however the town was not incorporated until 1830, at which time James McAllister became the first mayor.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., January 16, 1850.

¹¹ Opelousas Courier, July 24, 1858.

¹² "Historical Sketch," Inventory of the Parish Archives of Louisiana, Lafourche Parish (Thibodaux). The Louisiana Historical Records Survey Service Division WPA. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, 1942, pp. 1-23.

In about 1846 J. D. B. DeBow described Thibodaux as a town of about 900 where the inhabitants engaged in a variety of industrial, commercial, and professional enterprises.

. . . Merchants, physicians, builders and contractors, lawyers, jewelers, gunsmiths, saddlers, an apothecary, a shoemaker and a cabinet maker. There were also iron and brass foundries, an engine and finishing shop, a sawmill, a lyceum, a printing office, a bank, a market, sheet iron shops, taverns, coopering establishments, an ice house, coal and lumber yards, warehouses, and livery stables.¹³

The Thibodaux lyceum referred to by DeBow was an example of community social and cultural organizations common in the towns of Louisiana during the century. Professional people--ministers, attorneys, and physicians--usually led in the organizational and program planning activities. Meetings were ordinarily held weekly, and lectures and readings on scientific, historical, and literary subjects were included in the programs. There were in Thibodaux at this time churches representing Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist congregations. In addition to their religious activities these churches sponsored academies which were the community's better elementary schools before the war.

Although both English and French were spoken in Thibodaux before the war, much of the social activity of the community was conducted in French. Possibly both English and French speakers were included at lyceum meetings; however, the Philharmonic Society of

¹³ J. D. B. DeBow, "The Parishes of Louisiana," DeBow's Review, II (1846) 443. Cf. "Historical Sketch," op. cit., p. 5.

Thibodaux, organized in 1858, was French.¹⁴ Initially, the Philharmonic Society confined its activities to public concerts and balls. In July, 1861, members of the organization voted to become a dramatic society. During the time between its reorganization and the end of October the club sponsored seven dramatic performances.

The constitution of the Philharmonic Society, adopted on July 7, 1858, lists the charter members and provides specific regulations governing the activities of the society. Section Three of the constitution lists B. Roines, G. Josse, G. Cazenavette, F. Cherot, A. Roman, H. Cazenvette, E. Choi, and Th. Harang as charter members. Officers of the society were the president, orchestra leader, a secretary, a treasurer, and an archivist. The group engaged a hall owned by Mr. Crawford, to whom they were to pay an annual rent of \$216, in quarterly installments. According to the Philharmonic Society constitution, no member was permitted to retire from the organization during the year for which the hall had been rented except on a notice of eight days to the president; in such an instance the retiring member must pay to the treasury his share of all the debts, rent, etc., the society owed.

The records of the reorganization meeting of the society in 1861 include new names among the members: T. Adoue, G. H. Coigner,

¹⁴ H. Dansereau, Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance de Thibodaux, Account Book no. 5, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Dansereau was secretary of the organization in 1861, and his minute book contains the contribution of the Philharmonic Society and records of business meetings of the Dramatic Society during August, September and October, 1861.

J. Delas, A. L. St. Martin, F. Sencan, L. Aucoin, and C. Azeuna. Theo. Harang was elected president, and was asked to prepare a set of regulations to govern the new society, officially designated Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance de Thibodaux. T. Sencan was elected director of plays; G. Cazenavette, secretary; Louis Aucoin, treasurer; and H. Roine, orchestra leader. The treasurer was instructed to assess five dollars from each member, the initial membership fee. A committee of G. A. Coigner, F. Sencan, G. Cazenavette, and the president, were to secure a suitable building where performances could be held and to provide the necessary stage decoration and scenery. T. Adoue, J. Delas, and A. L. St. Martin formed the committee to select plays to put in rehearsal.

Regulations governing admission prices and reserved seats were adopted at the August 6 business meeting of the dramatic society. Adults and free Negroes ("gens de Couleur") were admitted for fifty cents. Children paid twenty-five cents. Servants with children, or their masters, were admitted for twenty-five cents. All reserved seats were seventy-five cents. Each member was voted the right of one reserved seat with the additional privilege of guests by securing the permission of the director.

Between August 17 and the end of October the dramatic club gave performances approximately every second week. As a rule the plays were short; two French plays and an English play made up each program. At the first performance of which there is a record Le Menage du Savetier, a one-act vaudeville, opened the program; Andy Blake, a two-act comedy, followed; and La Coquette, a one-act French comedy,

closed the performance. The selection committee restricted plays chosen for presentation to those of one and two acts in length; Thus it is evident that the Société Dramatique made no effort to follow the current practice in the commercial theater of programming a long play and a farce for each performance as non-professional theater groups in Alexandria and Clinton did during the pre-war period.

The members of the club elected Mr. Ribbeik to be in charge of building scenery for the theater, and they directed that dressing rooms be built on both sides of the stage. The size of the audiences can be judged only by the record of receipts from the various programs. From the August 17 performance receipts amounted to \$44.75; August 31, \$57.75; September 15, \$42.75; the fourth program \$20.25; fifth program, only \$7.50. It is not certain that these sums accumulated from ticket sales alone. At the September 1 business meeting the club passed a motion to reward "the mulatres [sic] Alfred and Eloi." One dollar was given to each of these individuals, who probably were employed to prepare and serve food to the theater audiences during intermission or after the plays.

Participation in the productions was not restricted to the members of the society. The president was asked to publish in the local newspaper an expression of thanks to the amateurs who assisted the group in presenting the August 17 program. By October the director was complaining of the difficulty of getting the plays prepared for the scheduled performance date; whereupon the group elected a copyist who was charged with getting sides into the hands of the respective cast members at least fifteen days prior to the scheduled date of performance. Mr. Roine, the orchestra director, was the first copyist;

and the club voted to pay him for his work.

The brief financial record of the Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance de Thibodaux shows that the club paid a great part of operating expenses by assessment of the members, and that from program receipts regular sums were voted to needy causes by the society. At the organizational meeting in July the treasurer was instructed to collect five dollars from each member. On August 6, the date of their second meeting, the treasurer was instructed to collect an additional \$1.50 from each member for "necessary expenses." An impromptu report called for at the August 24 meeting placed the approximate expenses of the society to that date at \$169.47. The report indicated that \$42.25 had been collected, \$14.00 was on hand, and there remained an indebtedness of \$113.22. A third fee assessment was made at the September 1 business meeting. The motion was approved requiring all members who were able to do so to pay into the club treasury ten dollars as soon as possible; those not able to pay the full amount were directed to give their "ticket" for the amount still unpaid. The only regular item of expenses which appeared in the minutes of the club was a five-dollar rental fee for the Hall for each performance.

The benevolent work of the society gained an immediate notoriety. At the September 1 meeting it was necessary for the club to choose a group of four, together with the president, to be known as the Committee of Aids, who would examine the requests for aid to determine those that were just, and to distribute those benefits allowed by the assembly. At consecutive meetings amounts of twenty, twenty-five, and fifteen dollars were voted to either the

poor or to the benevolent fund. Eight dollars on one occasion was voted to Mr. Coigner for help he had given to a family in need.

Receipts from the fifth performance having amounted to only \$7.50, the society decided at their business meeting on October 22 to give a concert. The following day, the group met again and formulated plans for the program. November 21 was designated as the date for the entertainment, and the program was to consist of three parts. Two parts were to be music; the third, novelties. Miss J. L. Scudday, Misses A. and B. Thibavaun, Mr. Arthur Knoblock, and Mrs. Plough were invited to assist with the concert. Four hundred tickets were ordered printed; moreover, these were to be sold for one dollar each.

On November 10 Mr. G. Cazenavette, secretary of the Société Dramatique made his last entry in the minute book. The war was at hand. The Lafourche Creoles under Captain Louis Bush were mustered into service on September 26, 1861, and the Allen Rifles, a unit of 144 men, was called to active duty in the following March.¹⁵

BAYOU TECHE

Franklin

Franklin, the seat of government for St. Mary parish, is located on Bayou Teche about sixty-five miles by stream from the Gulf of Mexico. By 1845 it had become an important center of the commerce of the Attakapas country; its French and English speaking citizens

¹⁵ "Historical Sketch," Inventory of Parish Archives, Lafourche Parish, op. cit., p. 6.

were evenly numbered by 1850;¹⁶ and many of the social amusements were conducted in English.

A survey of social activities from 1847 reveals a variety of enterprises including a non-professional theatrical organization which proved comparatively unsuccessful. The Franklin Lyceum, "literary and scientific society," became active through the initiating efforts of a Franklin minister, the Rev. S. J. Litton, in June, 1847.¹⁷ Alexander R. Splane, Esq., was the first president of the lyceum, and Walter B. Bradshear, Esq., was appointed secretary. Robert Wilson, editor of the Planters' Banner, Dr. James Smith, Thomas Pooley, a teacher, G. W. J. Copp, and the Reverend Litton formed the planning committee of the organization.¹⁸ In celebrating the anniversary of National Independence in 1847, the citizens of Franklin gave an elaborate and novel performance, including an improvised reenactment of the colonial debate on the Resolution for Independence. The program was conducted on Saturday, July 3.

At ten o'clock a Juvenile procession was formed and moved up Main street in the following order: The American Flag; Musicians; President and Reader; Benjamin Franklin, in the costume of '76; The Bust of Washington, beneath an arch of evergreens and flowers, surmounted by the American Eagle; Floral Emblem: The Cross; a beautiful white satin Banner, with the Motto: "Train up a child in the way he should go"; A Liberty Pole and Cap; the Mexican Lance, brought

¹⁶ Jewel Lynn De Grummond, A Social History of St. Mary Parish From 1845-1860, M. A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1948. p. 4.

¹⁷ Franklin Planters' Banner, June 24, 1847.

¹⁸ Ibid., July 1, 1847.

from Monterey by Lieut. Sanders; Floral Emblem: The Anchor; A beautiful green Banner, with the Motto: "Peace and Good Will upon Earth"; Bust of Benjamin Franklin; Then followed a number of boys with Banners, bearing the following Mottos: "From Centerville and Bayou Sale, We come today the boys to Rally." "Louisiana--These are thy jewels." "We must educate." . . .

The parade proceeded from the Franklin Exchange through the principal streets to "the spacious building on Mr. Thurber's lot," where at 11 o'clock the "Congress" assembled for the debate "on the Resolution for Independence. . . each speaker representing a Signer of the Declaration." According to the program published in the July 1 issue of the Planters' Banner, the following order of speakers was followed in the debate:

1st.	Francis Lewis	(op)	Benton E. Allen
2d.	Richard Henry Lee	(for)	Alex. R. Splane
3d.	Benjamin Rush	(for)	Robert Hare
4th.	Charles Carroll	(for)	Daniel E. Inger
5th.	Oliver Wolcott	(op)	Martin Dameret
6th.	Benj. Franklin	(for)	Abraham E. Dick
7th.	Thos. Jefferson	(for)	Peyton R. Splane
8th.	Richard Stockton	(op)	Lewis F. Smith
9th.	Roger Sherman	(for)	Stephen Duncan
10th.	John Hancock	(op)	Minus T. Gordy
11th.	John Adams	(for)	A. Wesley Gordy
12th.	Benj. Harrison	(for)	Richard B. Hudson
13th.	Stephen Hopkins	(for)	Felix H. Salles
14th.	John Dickinson	(op)	Robt. M. Royster
15th.	Philip Livingston	(for)	H. Crawford

A series of toasts, recitations, and patriotic songs followed the debate.

A grand ball closed the anniversary activities in the evening. In concluding his review of the program the local editor wrote:

. . . Here we should mention, by the way, that the speeches of Oliver Wolcott, Benjamin Franklin, Thos. Jefferson and Stephen Hopkins, were written by Dr. Smith, who, with Messrs. Pooley and Royster assisted in preparing for the fête.--For much of the interest which attended the proceedings, we are indebted to them. We

must say that we approve of this method of celebrating the Glorious Fourth. . . The debate upon the Resolution and Declaration --which, by the way, is an entirely new feature in such celebrations--excited much interest, and was conducted without the slightest difficulty, and in a manner highly creditable to the young orators. We must say, also, that we have never heard the Declaration read in a better style than on this occasion.¹⁹

Late in 1849 the Franklin Odd Fellows Hall was completed. The building was designed for commercial use and to provide a public hall. According to a general plan described in January, the structure was to be a three-story brick building "100 feet long, 40 feet wide, with an ell 40 by 20 feet."²⁰ The ground floor was planned for a dry goods store, an apothecary's shop, and a jeweler's shop; the second story, a ball room and offices; the third story, an Odd Fellow's Hall. The report of the dedication exercises held on November 9, 1849, described a different arrangement. Odd Fellow's Hall was then the "new three story building with business houses on the first floor, offices on the second, and the lodge hall and ball room on the third." A later description of the building appearing in a general editorial survey of the community published in the August 1, 1850, issue of the Planters' Banner is probably the most reliable of the three accounts:

. . . Standing in front of the court-house, the stranger (an assumed visitor in Franklin) is also in front of "Union Hall," which is a stock concern, principally owned, we believe, by the Independent Order of Odd-Fellows. This building has three stories: the first is occupied by stores; the second by a ball-room, where Terpsichore, Melpomene and Thalia hold their levees--for it is now neatly fitted up as a temple of the muses; and the third is dedicated to everlasting truth and universal benevolence. Within its sacred precincts

¹⁹ Ibid., July 8, 1847

²⁰ Ibid., January 25, 1849

meet the members of "Cyrus Royal Arch Chapter," "Franklin Lodge, No. 57, A. Y. M.," "St. Mary's Lodge, No. 20, I. O. O. F.," "Teche Division of the Sons of Temperance," and the "Cadets" of Younger Brothers of the same order. . .

After the dedication in November, 1849, there followed in Odd Fellows' Hall a series of balls. In March, 1850, Mr. and Mrs. Crerar moved the classes of their Dancing Academy to the new hall, where they gave frequent public recitals during the ensuing weeks. The school closed with a grand May Ball, on which occasion "Fancy Dances" were performed by the pupils. A Shawl Dance by seven young ladies, and an operatic Pas Seul by Mrs. Crerar were special features of the program. Mr. Craig and Mr. Fleetwood served as floor managers for the recital. Gentlemen's tickets were two dollars, and a good supper was provided.²¹

Beginning early in June, a group of professional actors from New Orleans appeared in a series of variety entertainments at Odd Fellows' Hall.²² The company, composed of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, Cordelia Dyke, and an actor identified as "Adrastus," moved to St. Martinville during the third week. On June 26, they returned to Franklin and began a series of plays which continued into August. At St. Martinville Miss Walters and Mr. Goodwin, actors of "high artistic reputation," joined the group. In July a young amateur actor from Centerville, a small community four miles south of Franklin, became a member of the company, making his debut as Young Norvel in Cordelia Dyke's benefit production of Douglas on July 19. On July 24,

²¹ Ibid., April 26, 1850.

²² Ibid., June 6, 1850.

a "distinguished amateur" of Franklin was the Claude Melnotte in Lady of Lyons for Mrs. Herbert's benefit. Mr. Coates, a violinist of Pattersonville south of Franklin, and Mr. Meyer, a Franklin musician, added to the summer's entertainment by furnishing music of a limited variety at the performances. Mr. Cline, another Franklin citizen, presented his new diorama between the plays at Goodwin's benefit on July 26. At the time it was shown the diorama consisted of

. . . three beautiful scenes--"The Fairy Grotto," "The Frozen Regions," and "Italian Scenery"--all of which are enlivened by moving figures of men, horses, ships, icebergs, &c., and these the artist intends, shall gradually be increased in number and variety.²³

The work of these Franklin amateur actors with the professional company motivated an interest in local theater among the actors and the community. The prospect of an early departure of the professional players following their benefit performances in July led to a move to organize a non-professional theater group in Franklin. In the August 1 issue of the Planters' Banner the editor wrote:

We are requested to state that a meeting of those interested in the formation of the "Franklin Histrionic Association" will be held in the Ball-room at Odd-Fellows' Hall on Saturday afternoon next, at 4 o'clock, to take into consideration the most advisable means of accomplishing their object.

. . .

In the meantime, a group of amateurs under the direction of a "Committee of Arrangements" were engaged in preparing Sheridan's adaptation of Kotzebue's tragedy Pizarro for production on August 9 as a complimentary benefit for Cordelia Dyke. Thus the proposed organizational meeting

²³ Ibid., August 1, 1850.

scheduled for August 3 was attended by only two who lived some miles out of town and who "were much disappointed, as they came expressly to attend the meeting."²⁴

Pizarro was produced on August 9 and 10. Attendance was not as great as had been expected. The review of the performances published in the August 15 issue of the weekly indicated that Mrs. Herbert and Miss Dyke assisted in the productions, but the reviewer was harsh in his comments, particularly concerning the evident lack of mutual understanding and unity of purpose among the amateurs.

The Complimentary Benefit to Miss C. Dyke came off on Friday last. The attendance was not as good as on her previous benefit. This may be attributed to two causes: in the first place, it was rumored that the price of admission for this night was to be raised to \$1 each, and, in the second place, many who have heretofore honored the theater with their presence and encouraged the beneficiary with their patronage were absent on a fishing party to the seashore. With regard to the first, we are at a loss to conjecture what could have given rise to the idea of advancing the price of the tickets for that night. We certainly are of (the) opinion that should there be any change in the price of admission between the performances of amateurs and regular actors, the change should be on the descending scale--say half the usual price; for when persons enter a theatre, they go to be amused and with a view to witness as good acting as possible, and it would be absurd to expect to see as good playing from amateurs as from those whose occupation it has been for years. As to the performance of the tragedy of Pizarro we have little to say, as we wish to avoid personalities. There was one character, however, it would be injustice to pass over without remark--we allude to Elvira, which was personated by Mrs. Herbert, who is no tyro in the walks of the drama. This character was really played--and well played, too. Rolla was much better performed than we anticipated, as were also other leading characters;

²⁴ Ibid., August 8, 1850.

but throughout the piece there was a decided want of life and energy. Previous to the rising of the curtain Miss Dyke came in front, and recited an address written for the occasion. The evening's amusement concluded with the farce of Pleasant Neighbors.

On the following night Pizarro was repeated, for the purpose of defraying the expenses of getting up the costumes, scenery, &c., for the previous night, but the receipts of the house fell far short of the object contemplated.

Three additional programs were given by the amateurs; on each of the occasions they were assisted by members of the professional group who remained in Franklin. Douglas Jerrold's drama The Rent Day and a comedy, Family Jars, were given on August 17; The Honey-moon and The Review, or The Wags of Windsor on August 24; and a program of miscellaneous selections from Shakespeare, a portion of Lady of Lyons, and the farce The Spectre Bridegroom on August 28. According to the weekly newspaper commentary, the first of these programs was the initial representation of "our Histrionics. . . as an Association." The audience was larger and the performances gave general satisfaction. "The taste of those who patronize theatricals here evidently calls for light, mirth-provoking pieces--not for heavy dramas and tragedies," the editor commented. The following week's program was given as a farwell benefit for Mrs. Herbert. It was scheduled as the last effort of the Histrionics; however, such a decided improvement was shown in both the excellence of performance and the size of the audience that the group added the August 28 program for Mrs. Herbert's benefit. On that occasion the attendance was small.

Early in August the local editor foresaw the lack of sufficient community-wide interest in the Histrionic Association. His following explanation provides sufficient reason for the discontinuance of the club.

. . . A few gentlemen took the matter in hand--not altogether for their own gratification, but with a view of enlivening the place, and having within ourselves the means of rational enjoyment, wherewith to while away an occasional dreary winter night. Nor is the time so devoted entirely lost, as some would make it appear, for many useful lessons may be and are drawn from the stage, which in many cases is the mirror of the human heart, and would teach us by example the necessity of more closely watching our own actions, and guarding against the insinuating and almost imperceptible encroachments of our evil passions. A trial has been given--the Association commenced operation, but none have come forward to enroll their names, and without that their ranks are too weak to give effect within themselves to anything they might produce, hence the necessity for abandoning the project--at least for the present. At a future day, should a more energetic action be evinced, the affair may perhaps be resumed, and may then succeed--but we are convinced that whatever is done must be accomplished on the impulse of the moment--the "sober second thought" looks too closely to the primary expenses of such an undertaking.²⁵

In 1852 the young men of Franklin reactivated the lyceum with the stated purpose of improving its members in public speaking.²⁶ Early the following year Frederick E. Bruns opened the Franklin Dancing School at Odd Fellows' Hall. On March 19 the school began a series of weekly recitals and public balls which continued until April 18, closing with an "Examination Ball." A part of the final program, as recorded in the April 14 issue of the Planters' Banner, included

. . . The Cracovienne . . . in Polish costume; The Chachucha, in full Spanish costume; the Highland Fling, in Scotch costume; the United States Naval Hornpipe, by four young gentlemen in sailor uniform; the National Polka, in fancy costume; The infant Polka, by two of Mr. Bruns's youngest pupils; The

²⁵ Ibid., August 22, 1850.

²⁶ Ibid., October 16, 1852.

Military Tambour Major Jig, by two young ladies in fancy costume; The Polka Quadrille, by seventy pupils; Military March Quadrille, by the same.

Admission to the balls was one dollar. Bruns then began a dancing class at Centerville, from where he commuted to direct public balls at Franklin's Odd Fellows' hall on alternate Mondays.²⁷ Nothing is known of the amusements in Franklin during the remainder of the decade immediately preceding the outbreak of the war. With Odd Fellows' Hall affording a place suitable for performances by professional companies, it is not unlikely that the town on the lower Teche was host to visiting troupes during the period. For their own amusement and cultural advancement the citizens probably found greater success in occasional balls, public lectures by members of the lyceum, and dancing school recitals than in any strictly theatrical activity.

New Iberia

New Iberia, the parish seat of Iberia Parish, is situated on Bayou Teche inland from Franklin. Very little is known of organized social or civic groups during the pre-war period. During the summer of 1847 the New Iberia Friendly Association was active. Leading members of the association were J. B. Hacker, Dr. Jerome Mudd, Dr. A. Duperier, J. G. and D. D. Richardson, Beverley Hunter, Samuel J. Denyer, G. Gonsoulin, Gaspard Rattier, F. R. Singleton, H. C. Wilson, J. Cobbs, E. F. Adams, Francis Thompson, Rev. Mr. Jenkins, and Judge Hallam. The Friendly Association was a community literary society. Frequently reports of their lectures, discussions, and debates appeared in the Franklin weekly.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., April 21, 1853

²⁸ Ibid., July-August, 1847, Passim.

St. Martinville

Theatrical activity in St. Martinville during the years of early Louisiana history has gained more frequent comment than that of any other rural community in the state. Situated on Bayou Teche in lower St. Martin parish, St. Martinville was an Acadian community--the center of the Evangeline Country. During the early years of the nineteenth century actors from the French Theatres in New Orleans frequently spent their vacations in St. Martinville. Their activities in the small bayou community gained publicity and added to the appeal to travelers and writers who have spread the story of the area.²⁹

St. Martinville was French. Its social activities remained French for the greater part of the nineteenth century.³⁰

²⁹ Louisiana, A Guide to the State Compiled by Workers and Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana: American Guide Series, (New York: Hastings House, 1940) 203-216. The Guide presents a summary of the fact and fiction of St. Martinville as an early theatrical center: "Though less brilliant, there was theatrical activity in the State outside New Orleans even in the early days. Probably the earliest was at St. Martinville. In the 1790's an influx of aristocratic French émigrés made the little bayou town a center of wealth and culture. Cable quotes a contemporary diary which mentions an early performance of the Barber of Seville."

Later, during the summer months, vacationing opera singers and actors from New Orleans presented opera and drama in a small theater. The New Orleans Bee for August, 1850, reports on the success 'brilliant and way beyond all hope conceived' of a group of artists from the Orleans Theater who, 'seeking to benefit during the slack season, formed a society and went bag and baggage to St. Martinville to run the Music Hall of the locality.'" (see pp. 210-11).

³⁰ In reviewing a St. Martinville Dramatic Club performance in 1888, a local editor wrote: ". . . Next followed a new feature in our entertainments, which was greatly appreciated by the audience, and especially by those who do not understand French, Change Partner, a commedietta in English, which was admirably well rendered. . . ." (St. Martinville Messenger, July 28, 1888.)

Grand Coteau

St Charles College, established by the Jesuits in 1835, gave Grand Coteau, a small community in the southern part of St. Landry parish, an importance as a cultural center before the war. Subsidized by the state educational fund, St. Charles College was the most advanced and leading educational institution in that section of Louisiana. By 1858 the catalogue of the school listed a faculty of eighteen professors, including the President, and an enrollment of 155 students, principally from St. Landry and adjacent parishes.³¹ Music and drama were given important places in the curriculum at St. Charles College, and frequently special exhibitions were prepared for public audiences. Commencement exercises annually included productions of plays in both French and English.³²

The college charged no admission to its public performances. The program of the day's exercises consistently began before 10 o'clock in the morning and continued until five in the afternoon. In order to accommodate the huge audiences of patrons and friends of the school who attended, a great pavilion was erected on the west side of the college building. At one end was a stage, described by one reporter as being "supplied with all the necessary theatrical appurtenances." During the

³¹ Opelousas Courier, September 18, 1858.

³² Typical of the Commencement programs of St. Charles College during the 1840's was that of 1844: "The examinations will take place, on the 6th and 7th, the annual commencement, on the 10th of September. The principal exercises of this day will be vocal and instrumental music, some dialogues in various languages, a debate in English, a dramatic performance in French--and the distribution of premiums. The whole to commence at 8 o'clock A.M. (Opelousas Gazette, August 31, 1844.)

the summer months of 1857 a semi-permanent "shed-like but substantial structure, capable of accommodating one thousand persons" was erected on the grounds behind the college building for use as a theater.³³

In 1845 the Philharmonic Society orchestra of the college was a feature of the closing exercises. The play on that occasion was Moliere's L'Avare.³⁴ Washington's birthday was celebrated with "literary exercises" and an English play in 1857. At the August commencement that year the plays were The Inn Keeper, an English comedy, and a tragedy Anapide, "composed in Latin verse by a learned Jesuit at Rome, and translated by another into French verse."³⁵

During 1858 the college gave three dramatic programs. For the anniversary of Washington's birth on February 22, a group of students led by Charles Hardy as Pierre O'hara appeared in a production of The Irish Attorney.³⁶ Fish Out of Water, a comedy, a patriotic address, and a humorous French dialogue "between a schoolmaster and his pupils," made up the program for July 4 which was attended by an audience of approximately four hundred.³⁷

³³ Opelousas Courier, March 27, 1858.

³⁴ A candid commentary on the practice of teaching theater in St. Charles College was included in Correspondent "M's" review of the production: "The particular utility of cultivating, among the students, a talent for the histrionic art, the writer confesses that he cannot very clearly perceive; but, inasmuch as he supposes that the learned members of the faculty of 'St. Charles' understand these matters better than himself, he will not attempt a discussion of its propriety, but content himself with remarking that the piece was well played, and that the characters of the Miser and the Servant were delineated with a correctness and fidelity to the conceptions of the author which would have done credit to regular members of the 'sock and buskin' profession." (Opelousas St. Landry Whig, July 24, 1845.)

³⁵ Courier, September 5, 1857.

³⁶ Ibid., March 27, 1858.

³⁷ Ibid., July 17, 1858

On August 21 the commencement plays were William Tell and Le Siege de Colchester, a one-act, the cast of which was "composed exclusively of the Creole young gentlemen of this parish." A correspondent who signed OBSERVERER reported an audience of six hundred "a low estimate" for those who attended the performances. Of the performance of the tragedy the writer indicated a cast of some fifteen characters,

. . .comprising young gentlemen from various parts of the country. The time occupied in the performance of the piece, I estimate at one hour and a half, and the interest was kept up to the end. Various criticisms were hazarded by the experienced and learned of the audience (and they were many)--some enthusiastically asserting that they had never witnessed better in the Theatres of New Orleans, whilst others stoutly maintained that the acting hardly came up to that standard. . .³⁸

During the years immediately preceding the war the directors of the college productions followed a practice of assigning to the casts of the English plays members of the junior class, and casting the French plays from among the graduating students. In 1859 Berquin's The Sword was played by "Junior Students." The same day the Senior Students again offered L'Avare. John Woodvil, or The Evils of Drunkenness was played the following year "by young students who had never appeared on the stage. . ."³⁹

Grand Coteau citizens were content to have the college provide their theatrical entertainment prior to the war. There is no reference to a locally sponsored theater group. However, in September, 1860, a troupe of French players engaged the Opelousas Varieties Theater and

³⁸ Ibid., September 18, 1858.

³⁹ Ibid., September 1, 1860.

"proposed performing alternately in Opelousas, Washington and Grand Coteau as long as they are well patronized."⁴⁰ Their audiences were not generous, and on October 14 the troupe gave its final performance in Grand Coteau.

Opelousas

The St. Landry Whig of Opelousas published in consecutive issues in November, 1844, three essays treating the values of planned amusements. Each of the editorials proposed one specific type of activity that the people of the town should undertake. The first was a parish museum in which would be collected for general inspection Nature's "curious freaks" and "her wonderful works." The writer maintained that a museum would give a "better idea of matters and things, than the poring over of many musty pages."⁴¹ The second editorial advocated the organization of a village choir; the third, the formation of a debating club. In these short essays is expressed possibly a community feeling of the need for self-improvement.

Few details of the social history of Opelousas before 1840 are known. The town was the seat of government for Opelousas County during the territorial period. When the counties were divided into smaller parishes, Opelousas became the parish seat of St. Landry parish. In 1809, while the Superior Court was in session, young Thomas C. Nicholls came from New Iberia to Opelousas to be examined for admission to the bar. Some thirty years later Nicholls wrote in his diary:

⁴⁰ Ibid., September 29, 1860.

⁴¹ St. Landry Whig, November 7, 1844.

. . . It had been determined before I left home that I should locate in Opelousas and practice law, and accordingly I took board at an old tavern kept by Edmund Johnson and was ready to receive a fee. Unfortunately, however, no fee came.

In the absence of all occupation, I adopted the conduct of the idle young men with which the village abounded. . .

The tavern was a large frame house with a gallery in front. One end of the gallery was occupied by the barroom. . . Stepping from the gallery of the tavern you entered the billiard room, to which the guests repaired from the breakfast table. We played billiards until the bell rang for dinner, which was hurriedly swallowed that we might return to the game. Supper still found us occupied in the same manner. Afterwards we continued until a late hour of the night.⁴²

During the years of Nicholls' rise to the office of District Judge he and his idle compatriots had occasion to attend the activities of Opelousas religious groups--Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist--to attend recitals given by itinerant dancing masters, perhaps exhibitions by the pupils of the local schools, even concerts by a group of musicians who were acquaintances. In 1842 notices of two such musical entertainments appeared in the Opelousas weekly. Fritz and Christian Baumgarten, assisted by Mrs. Maraist "and an Amateur," presented a vocal and instrumental concert at Martel's hotel on March 5. Two months later, on May 6, Professor Tosco of Cincinnati, "assisted by J. O. Gorman and others," presented the final of a series of concerts at the Eagle Hotel. Both of these groups may have been concert musicians, making no effort to add to their incomes by teaching as many did during the period. Tickets to the performances were one dollar.⁴³

⁴² Saxon, op. cit., p. 119.

⁴³ Opelousas Gazette, March 5, April 30, 1842.

Opelousas was six miles away from the nearest navigable stream, Bayou Courtableau at Washington, Louisiana, to the north. The town was not as conveniently accessible to strolling entertainers who traveled by boat as other towns along Bayou Teche. Nevertheless one such company appeared in Opelousas in July, 1845. "The Opera Troupe which are now in our village, are preparing to give a course of twelve representations. We understand the first will shortly be brought out."⁴⁴ Three weeks later the editor unenthusiastically wrote: "Our theatricals are doing something here--what, we cannot say! We shall drop in on them shortly, and see if they are 'good, bad, or indifferent.'" The performances were probably given in French, which fact may explain the English editor's indefinite comments.

In February, 1856, Simon Richard, an Opelousas chemist, mechanic, and puppeteer, presented his puppets before a public audience for the first time. They appeared as an addenda to a lecture and dioramic display by Bruce and Rives.⁴⁵ An earlier performance by Bruce and Rives was not well attended. Rives, a blind man of twenty-five, succeeded in creating an interest among his audience to hear another of his illustrated lectures. Whereupon he was engaged for the second program on February 27. Simon Richard, "a man of generous heart, and a sympathizer," offered his services to exhibit his puppets "in order to add something in the way of amusement. . .⁴⁶ The lecture took place in the Union Hotel. Rives' performance was

⁴⁴ St. Landry Whig, July 3, 1845.

⁴⁵ Opelousas Patriot, March 1, 1856.

⁴⁶ Opelousas Courier, February 16, 1856.

of secondary importance on this occasion, according to the editor's review in the Patriot of March 1; of the puppets, however, he observed:

. . . they were the most life-like and altogether the best that we ever saw. We would like to give a description of them, but really our skill falls short. We can only say that, in common with the rest of the audience, we were delighted, and left the room with a satisfied sensibility of Mr. Richard's exquisite skill: his puppets will 'do to travel.'

On the following July 4 Richard yielded to the "solicitation of his friends" to give a grand display of "fireworks, composed of a choice of subjects to suit the circumstances." Where the exhibition took place is not recorded; however, an admission price of fifty-cents was charged for adults; Children and servants were admitted for half-price.⁴⁷

In late October James S. Charles, a comedian and theater manager of wide reputation, opened the Opelousas Varieties Theater with a newly formed company from New Orleans.⁴⁸ Originally, Charles planned an engagement of two weeks, but the company played nightly until November 29. He moved to Washington on December 1, performing there for two weeks, and returned to the Varieties Theater for six performances on December 15 through 20, "prior to his departure for Red River." With an occasional exception the weeklies carried advertisements of only the programs of Saturdays, dates of their publication. Hence the plays of only ten performances are recorded, these including 17 titles of one and two-act farces and comedies and three or four full-length plays which were running

⁴⁷ Patriot, June 28, 1856.

⁴⁸ His early advertisements in the Opelousas weeklies began: "Mr. James S. Charles, manager of the Memphis and Vicksburg Theatres, and late of the Gaiety, New Orleans, has the honor to announce to the inhabitants of Opelousas his intention of giving a series of Dramatic Drawing Room Entertainments, consisting of Comedies, Vaudevilles, Recitations, etc. . ." (Patriot, November 1; Courier, November 8, 1856.)

currently in theaters over the country.

The company had only seven members, five men and two women. An eighth name, Mr. Thompson, appeared as "John" in the cast of His Last Legs on November 15, probably an Opelousas amateur who offered his services to the company on occasion.⁴⁹ James S. Charles of course, was the leading actor of the company. Walter Birch, W. E. Anderton, Harry Wilson, and A. I. Menken were the other male members of the group; and Mrs. Adah B. Menken and Grace Greenwood, the only female members.

For two reasons this 1856 engagement of the Charles Company in Opelousas is significant. First, from the point of view of this study, the troupe fitted the Varieties Theater which served non-professional theater groups in Opelousas throughout the Reconstruction period. Second, it provides the earliest records of Adah Isaacs Menken's apprenticeship as an actress in regular drama.⁵⁰

A group of young women of Opelousas gave a concert of vocal and instrumental music at the Varieties Theater on December 2. The

⁴⁹ In a letter to the manager of the company offering a complimentary benefit on November 29, T. H. Thompson was among the twenty-six names of Opelousas citizens appended. (Patriot, November 29, 1856). When the free public school was opened in January, 1857, it was announced that "... The Male Department will be under the care of Mr. T. H. Thompson, at the Bank Building, opposite the Court-House. The Directors could not have made a better selection. . ." (Patriot, January 3, 1857.)

⁵⁰ During the Opelousas engagement of the Charles Company in October, November and December, 1856, Adah Isaacs Menken appeared in at least twelve different roles. Prominent among them were Pauline in Lady of Lyons, on November 2 and 11, and Julia in The Hunchback, on November 29, both of which are identified with young actress' appearances in Shreveport and New Orleans in 1857 and 1858. (See Catherine H. Leach, Adah Isaacs Menken: The Biography of an American Actress, Unpublished master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1937, p. 34.)

entertainment, given as a benefit for Mrs. Walkley the music teacher, was made up of twenty-five musical numbers with Mrs. Walkley, Mary King, Lucy Taylor, Fanny Campbell, and Misses M. Kenison, Overton, and Hoy participating. Activities concluded with a cotillion party. Admission was one dollar, and the advanced sale of tickets was conducted at the establishments of C. N. Ealer, John Posey, and P. L. Hegrand & Company in Opelousas, and at A. Millspaugh's in Washington.⁵¹

On February 1, 2, and 3, 1858, Spalding and Rogers' "newly organized Campbell Minstrels" performed at the Opelousas Varieties Theater. The appearance of the professional minstrel troupe motivated the organization of the Juvenile Minstrels of Opelousas, who gave two performances at the Varieties "in imitation of Spalding & Rogers" during the following month. At the second of these programs, on March 6, Simon Richard exhibited his puppets "in order to encourage the youthful artist as well to contribute to the public amusement." Admission was twenty-five cents for adults and ten cents for children.⁵²

During the following November James S. Charles returned to the Varieties Theater in Opelousas, opening on the 17th with the comedy The Day After the Wedding, and two farces, Root Hog or Die and In and Out of Place. The company was smaller and less successful than the 1856 group. Only Charles and Harry Wilson of the earlier troupe were among the actors returning in 1858. Mrs. Virginia Smith, a New Orleans actress and dancing teacher,⁵³ was the featured actress. Lottie St. Clair

⁵¹ Patriot, November 29; Courier, December 6, 1856.

⁵² Courier, March 6, 1858; Patriot, March 6, 1858.

⁵³ During 1856 Mrs. Virginia Smith's New Orleans Dancing Academy was located at Eagle Hall, corner of Felicity Road and Prytania Street. (Daily Picayune, November 25, 1856.)

and V. G. Ryder were the other members of the company mentioned in the reviews of the Opelousas weeklies. The company performed nightly until mid-December, when the theater closed because of insufficient patronage. Justifying both Charles' work during the engagement and the lack of interest on the part of the community, the Courier editor offered the following explanation on December 18:

OUR THEATRE.--The attempt of Mr. Charles, the manager of the little theatre of our village, has proved unsuccessful, in our opinion; and should convince him that our community does not admire this sort of recreation. If we are mistaken in our judgment about these things, we must suppose that his troupe is not what it should be to draw large houses in Opelousas. It is true that the number and the capacity of his actors do not permit him to give representations on a grand scale, and when he ventures to give any thing more than a little farce, we are instantly struck with the paucity of his performers and want of ability in the greater number of those he has with him. Mr. Charles is himself, without doubt, an able actor, always capable to fill with ability the role of the principal character in a piece, leaving some slight defect often unperceptible /sic/. Furthermore, he neglects nothing in order to please the public taste in the selection of his pieces, but he is not supported as he should be, and, with the exception of 2 or 3 of his performers there is not one upon whom he can rely. Under these circumstances a drama or a vaudeville where the principal actors are numerous cannot be well rendered, even with the best intentions in the world.

Nevertheless, the public, we think, has acted with ingratitude towards Mr. Charles. He often has given amusing and instructive representations to 20 or 30 persons, and when the performance has been repeated, the audience has not been greater. They cannot say that the expense is too great, the small pittance of 50 cts., is all that is charged for admittance; they may even dispense with the expense of the bouquet banal. We repeat then, that the community has shown ingratitude to a man who has offered them a cheap and edifying amusement.

Programs of tableaux vivants formed a part of activities at a Fair sponsored by the Episcopal Church on April 14 and 16, 1859. Twelve subjects made up the series of stage scenes. The representations were given at the parish courthouse. The sequence of the tableaux is difficult

to determine; however, the subjects reported fall into groups treating religion and sentiment, history and patriotism, comedy scenes, and a final group selected for their scenic arrangement. Titles recorded in the review, without suggesting the order, included Pilgrims at the Holy Cross, The Graveyard Scene, "by a mother's tomb were the orphan sisters, in an attitude of prayer, while the angel mother hovered near with her guardian wings," and Parting of Paul and Virginia; two tableaux in the next group were National Tableau, "representing the Queen of liberty, with surrounding emblems of the thirty-three States--thirty-three young ladies dressed in gay attire, welcoming their Queen by the National Song, 'Hail Columbia,'" and Capture and Release of Captain John Smith, in which "the dress and manners and warwhoop were decidedly Indian-like. . ." Tableaux in a lighter vein included Revolution in Woman's Sphere, a satirical treatment of the "woman's rights" movement, Five Minutes Too Late, and Dumb Concert and Gossips, possibly two different scenes which were described as being "decidedly laughable and entertaining." For the scenic effects of the pictures were presented Cupid Among the Flowers, May Queen, Rustic Cottage Scene, with the song "John Anderson My Jo," and a Stagnary Group, representing Love, Hope, Despair and Prayer. The director of the programs was evidently a visiting artist, the reviewer having concluded: ". . . we must acknowledge that the lady who has been at the head of all these entertainments, deserves the highest praise. . . She has made many endearing attachments during her sojourn in our town. . ." Proceeds from the fair and the two theatrical entertainments were reported as "upwards of five hundred dollars."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Patriot, April 23, 1859.

On September 29, 1860, a company of French actors opened an engagement at the Opelousas Varieties Theater, proposing to perform "alternately in Opelousas, Washington, and Grand Coteau, as long as they are well patronized." The company included a variety of music, dance, vaudeville, and farce, according to the comments. Jobin et Nanette, a vaudeville, and Jean le Sot, and opera bouffe featuring "M. Gautier et Mme Reiter" on October 9 were the only titles given. Audiences were too small, and the company closed with the October 13 performance, afterwards going to Grand Coteau for a performance on October 14 and to Vermillionville (Lafayette) on the 15th.⁵⁵

In 1861 and 1862 Opelousas, like the other communities of Louisiana, busied itself equipping the volunteers. Anthony Wimmer, the music teacher, conducted vocal and instrumental concerts in which ladies of St. Landry parish assisted. These benefits were held at the Varieties Theater and the admission was one dollar.⁵⁶ The last entertainment for the benefit of the volunteers was an elaborate series of Tableaux Vivants at the courthouse on March 19, 1862. Comments on the success of the performance suggest a spirit of optimism at the time: "Most of the subjects represented," the Courier editor reported, "were of a popular and patriotic style; provokingly and deafeningly applauded. . ."⁵⁷

Throughout the south Louisiana Bayou Country during the first half of the nineteenth century populations divided into English and French speaking groups prevented an early development of common

⁵⁵ Courier, September 29, October 13, 1860.

⁵⁶ Patriot, October 5, 1861.

⁵⁷ March 22, 1862.

community social and cultural activities. Musical programs were becoming frequent during the early 1840's. Between 1845 and 1850 three towns organized community lyceums. Dancing schools and their accompanying public exhibitions began about 1850. On July 4, 1847, Franklin celebrated the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence with an all-English program. Three communities formed amateur theatrical organizations during the last decade of the period. The Franklin Histrionic Association gave four performances during the summer of 1850, then discontinued its activity. A small group, inspired by a group of strolling players who visited Franklin for performances during June and July, thought to arouse a community interest in a local theatrical organization. They launched their association with the assistance of three of the professional actors, but too few fellow citizens joined the enterprise and the club disbanded after the fourth performance. The Opelousas Juvenile Minstrels formed their organization following an appearance in Opelousas of the Spalding and Roger's Minstrel Troupe in 1858. Like the Rapides Amateur Ethiopian Serenaders of Alexandria in 1850, the Opelousas company gave a few successful programs burlesquing contemporary subjects and disbanded. The Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance of Thibodaux grew out of the town's regularly organized Philharmonic Society. The group adopted a constitution; elected officers, including a president, secretary, treasurer, stage manager, and orchestra director; and assessed its membership for operational funds. The established entrance fee to performances was fifty cents for adult whites and free negroes and half price for children and servants. The society gave performances approximately every two weeks, the

programs consisting of two French and one English one-act plays. Funds received at performances were distributed by a committee of the club to charitable causes in the community.

St. Charles College of Grand Coteau provided theater training for its upper classmen and presented public performances of established French and English drama between 1844 and 1861. Students gave daytime performances from an outdoor stage. Programs were free, and large audiences from a wide surrounding area attended them.

Two theaters were built in the area prior to the Civil War. Donaldsonville built the Varieties Theater in 1842; The Odd Fellows of Franklin built the Odd Fellows' Union Hall in 1849. The Varieties Theater in Opelousas, a vacant building equipped by the James S. Charles theater company in 1856, proved an adequate playhouse for both the community and visiting entertainers throughout the Reconstruction period. The earliest places of entertainment were the ball rooms of local hotels, vacant stores rented for public halls, and the St. Landry Courthouse on occasion.

The variety of professional theater in the Bayou Country was much below that of the Florida Parishes and the Red River area before the Civil War; However, Donaldsonville, on the Mississippi River, and Franklin and Opelousas on Bayou Teche had professional dramatic troupes for brief periods after 1838. During the late years of the period circuses and minstrel troupes were relatively frequent throughout the area.

CHAPTER IV
NORTHEAST LOUISIANA

Monroe

Except for Monroe, Ouachita Parish, the greater part of Northeast Louisiana was very thinly settled before the Civil War. Comparatively little is known of the social activities of the scattered communities. They were predominantly agricultural settlements. Pioneers from the Carolinas, Alabama, and Mississippi made farms along the Ouachita River and its tributaries where they grew cotton and more cotton.

Monroe had its beginning when Don Juan Filhiol, the Spanish commandant of the Ouachita Settlements, established Fort Miro on the east side of the river and drew up plans for a town. In 1805 the Orleans Territorial Legislative Council created Ouachita County as one of the twelve administrative units of the territory, and Fort Miro became the seat of county government.

Steamboat navigation was extended up the Ouachita after the early years of the nineteenth century, and the village immediately assumed greater importance as a shipping point. In 1819 the steamer James Monroe docked at Fort Miro, and the enthusiastic citizens changed the name of their village for this first engine-powered craft to visit them.¹ Monroe was chartered by the Louisiana State Legislature in 1820. Its progressive citizens began to turn part of their

¹ "Historical Sketch," Inventory of Parish Archives of Louisiana: Ouachita Parish (Monroe) Louisiana Historical Records Survey mimeographed. (Baton Rouge: Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, 1942), 1-27.

energy toward the cultural improvements demanded by a gradually increasing population. An outstanding individual among them was Judge Bry, whom Timothy Flint characterized as "the opulent and intelligent Genevieve planter. . . who has enobled his the ordinary money getting pursuit of the planter by directing it by science, experiment, and taste."² Flint was impressed by Judge Bry's hospitable mansion and his collection of English and French books and periodicals which "offered food for intellectual wants." Other prominent names in the early growth and development of Northeast Louisiana included the Morgans, Oliver and Johnathan; Thomas C. Lewis, a parish judge; Thomas Barlow, Lloyd Posey, John Hughes, J. R. Dewitt, John T. Faulk, D. A. Breard, Hypolite Parquod, R. D. Richardson, John F. Girod, Michel Pomier, Charles Betin, John and Celestin Landerman, Benjamin Ballou, and John Faulk.³

The Ouachita School Society was incorporated in 1837 and empowered to raise funds by lottery to promote education.⁴ The same year the Ouachita Female Academy was established. Religious groups --Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist--established churches for their growing congregations between 1840 and the early 1850's.⁵ In 1859 the gentlemen of Monroe organized the Monroe Lyceum with F. A. Hall and A. H. Martin serving as its first president and secretary,

² Timothy Flint, "Journal of the Rev. Timothy Flint from The Red River to the Ouachitta, or Washita, in Louisiana, in 1835," in The Select Circulating Library Part I--1836. (Philadelphia, Adam Waldie, 1836) 284-288.

³ "Historical Sketch," Inventory of Parish Archives, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴ Louisiana Acts, 1837. No. 112.

⁵ "Historical Sketch," Inventory of Parish Archives, op. cit., p. 25.

respectively.⁶ The editor of the local weekly described the young organization as flourishing, and notices indicate that meetings were held at the courthouse on Thursday evenings of each week. Lectures, debates, and discussions were the characteristic activities. Topics were generally of current or historical political problems. John McEnery spoke on English History at the second meeting in December, and his "eulogy upon the death of Charles the First was quite as graceful and beautiful as it was just."⁷ On January 19, 1860, members of the lyceum discussed the question "Would the acquisition of more territory to the United States at the present time be beneficial to the permanent interest of the Government?" S. Bard and R. Richardson supported the affirmative, and S. L. Slack and J. McEnery were assigned to lead the opposition.⁸ The Male Academy organized a debating society in January. Masters Green and J. Beacham, G. and A. Sparks, John Ray, Jr., and J. Washburn were the first elected officers.⁹ In April Mrs. Delery directed her pupils of the Female Institute in a grand concert, the feature number of the program being a "Union" dialogue.¹⁰ This was the first and only dramatic entertainment in Monroe before the war of which any reference has been found. It was probably an original sketch treating the subject of secession and prepared specifically for the program.

Monroe was favored by a one-day performance of Spalding and Rogers' circus in March. The big show came up the Ouachita, stopping

⁶ Ouachita Register, December 1, 1859.

⁷ Ibid., December 22, 1859.

⁸ Ibid., January 19, 1860.

⁹ Ibid., February 2, 1860.

¹⁰ Ibid., April, 12, 1860.

for exhibitions at Trenton, Alabama Landing, Ouachita City, and Fort Adams. More of the traveling theatrical organizations of the period may have visited Monroe, since the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Texas Railroad completed its line westward from the Mississippi River in 1860. However, the war between the states soon isolated Monroe and Louisiana from professional entertainers who might have visited them.

Summary

For most of Louisiana the pre-Civil War period was generally a time of establishment and beginning development. Although some of the villages were old at the start of the nineteenth century, new settlers with new ambitions pouring in from the eastern and southern United States changed total outlooks. In the French settled area of the southern Bayou Country the coming of English speaking settlers posed added language problems. With the early founding of churches and schools the communities established permanency. Then followed steps in providing for their recreation and amusement on community-wide scales, marking the healthy growth and development of the area.

Types of amusement which the people provided for themselves were essentially uniform during the first half century. In small part only were entertainments theatrical, and purely dramatic entertainment was of relatively small consequence. For recreation and mental stimulation most communities established library associations at an early period. Lyceums, literary societies, debating clubs afforded limited numbers opportunities for public performance. Lectures, interpretive reading of literature, vocal and instrumental music, oratory, and debate provided the requisite variety which held audience interest at these

group programs. More theatrical and more purely entertaining were the numerous dancing and music school recitals, planned and directed by itinerant teachers. Public balls and community-wide celebrations of patriotic holiday anniversaries became customs universally popular during the pre-war period.

Five organized community theater groups furnished regular drama in their respective communities for short periods. Young men of St. Francisville organized the St. Francisville Theater Association during the winter months of 1810-1811 amid the political turmoil accompanying the transfer of the Florida Parishes from Spain to the Orleans Territory. Alexandria established its Thespian Society in 1821, a little more than a decade after the town was founded. The Franklin Histrionic Association, active in 1850; The Clinton Shakespearean Society, in 1855; and the Thibodaux Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance, in 1861, came late in the period after citizens had become experienced in providing for their own recreation. Although these organized groups worked in different areas and at different times, common characteristics marked their organization, their objectives, and their plan of activities. The St. Francisville, Thibodaux, and probably the Alexandria groups adopted constitutions and by-laws to govern their organizations. For these three groups elected officers directed activities, with stage managers in charge of directing productions. The Clinton theater group was organized and directed by Henry A. Nicholls, and the Franklin Association was short lived because it found no adequate leadership. Objectives expressed by the groups included first, to provide worthwhile entertainment for their

respective communities. The Clinton organization aimed to develop the acting and musical talents of its members, and the Thibodaux society posed the accumulation of funds for charity as an added objective. According to present information, all these amateur groups gave performances approximately every two weeks during the period of their activity. Plays were those being given in contemporary American theaters. Comedies were more popular generally, although serious plays were included in the amateur repertoires. The comedies of Goldsmith and Sheridan were prominent among productions by the Alexandria Thespian Society early in the century. The Thibodaux group usually gave programs of three one-act plays--two French and a single English play. Programs of other amateur groups consisted of a full-length play, an interlude of music, and an afterpiece. Each group equipped its own theater, usually in a vacant business house; and seating capacities were small. They gave particular attention to necessary stage scenery and costuming for individual productions. Reviews of performances indicated the actors were sincere in their efforts and frequently achieved a high degree of excellence.

In Alexandria and Opelousas the young men organized amateur minstrel companies in imitation of visiting professional minstrel troupes. Each group prepared minstrel routines of monologue, skit, and song and dance routines burlesquing people and events familiar to their audiences; presented them in a few local programs; and discontinued their organizations. Daytime outdoor productions of regular classic and contemporary plays by the St. Charles College at Grand Coteau between 1844 and 1861 marked a trend followed among

parochial and, to some extent, by public secondary schools throughout Louisiana during later periods.

Individual and small group performances by humorous lecturers, dramatic readers, song and recitation teams, and novelty and concert musicians characterized professional theatrical entertainment throughout Louisiana during the pre-war period. Minstrel companies, showboats, and circuses were more frequent during the late years of the period. After 1838 brief engagements by small theatrical companies became customary. Managers of these troupes usually suited a vacant building as a playhouse where the company played engagements extending in duration from one to four or five weeks. Little influence was apparent between professional and community theatrical groups. Amateurs imitated traveling minstrel troupes, and a professional company that augmented its corps of actors with amateur performers in Franklin in 1850 inspired those citizens to form the Franklin Histrionic Association. Because the people of Franklin did not share the amateurs' enthusiasm and interest, the organization dissolved after its fourth performance.

PERIOD OF RECONSTRUCTION

1866 - 1880

CHAPTER V
FLORIDA PARISHES

Clinton

During the years of Reconstruction many of the towns of the parishes east of the Mississippi River organized non-professional theater groups. The first theatrical entertainments after the war were sponsored by church groups. Their objective was to collect funds for the rehabilitation of the community institutions which had greatly deteriorated during and following the Civil War. These occasional community theatrical performances motivated a general interest among the people; consequently, during the early 1870's individuals with experience and ability, and others with the urge simply to participate in theatrical performances, formed amateur theater clubs to carry on regular programs. There was a noticeable community interest in the post war organizations which was lacking among non-professional groups before 1860. Moreover, these clubs of the 1870's were eager to produce plays principally for the values which come from participation. Comedies and farces were played to give outlet for the funmaking of the local comedians. Sentimental melodramas were probably as effectively performed and were popular with the audiences.

Clinton, in East Feliciana, had the earliest of the organized theatrical groups in the Florida Parishes after the war. In May, 1870, the Patriot presented the good news to the citizens:

When we mention the fact that the old "Clinton Thespian Association" has been re-organized under the name of "The Clinton Amateurs," and will give a series of entertainments during the season, all the fun-loving and charitably inclined people of this region will "rejoice and be exceeding glad," cause why--cause they give the proceeds of their entertainments to worthy distressed fellow creatures in this community
¹

The pre-war Clinton Thespian Association was an organized group of Clintonians who gave the town a thriving theater during 1855. Because the group had a very small theater and because of their rather restricted membership under the leadership of a single individual, the organization failed when that leader moved away from the community early in 1856.

The Dramatic Association of 1870 had an adequate hall in which to perform. The Masonic Hall, probably constructed before the war, was described by its planners in 1859. It was to be "a plain, but substantial building, 50 by 90 feet, three stories in height; the ground floor to be used as a Public Hall; the second, as a Male Academy; and the third, for Masonic purposes."²

Immediate inspiration for organizing came perhaps from benefit performance sponsored by members and friends of St. Andrews' Church of Clinton the last week in April. The program was advertised as Tableaux and Supper; performances were given on two successive evenings, and each evening's activity ended with a dance. The entertainments were given at Masonic Hall. Admission to the tableaux was fifty cents; to the supper, one dollar.

¹ East Feliciana Patriot, May 7, 1870.

² Feliciana Democrat, February 5, 1859.

Two weeks later, on May 12, the Clinton Amateurs gave their first performance. Titles of the plays were not given in the review, but the program was long and varied.

Our home boys--and they are O.K.,--played to a well filled and delighted house on the evening of the 12th inst. at Masonic Hall. We don't know where to commence an encomium and if we did we would not know when to stop. This we do say that the Amateurs played all they put on the bills--in a manner that gratified those who were out--and everybody and his wife was there The gentlemen composing this association are proud of the greeting given them in their first appearance, and they plan to give a series of entertainments during the summer season for the gratification of their home friends.³

Did this hearty response of Clinton people continue to sustain their theatrical organization? There is no reason to believe that there were not intervals of inactivity before 1875. During the summer of that year the Dramatic Club gave performances.⁴ However, no details of the programs are preserved before the season of 1877. In April the Clinton Dramatic Association conducted a tournament and Calico Ball. In seeking the co-operation of the citizens of the parish in the elaborate public exhibition, the local weekly emphasized the continued efforts of the club to provide entertainment, an only clue to past activities.

. . . The Dramatic Association has struggled hard to please the people and render itself one of the permanent institutions of our midst, and that they have succeeded beyond the expectations of the most sanguine, is an established fact.⁵

³ East Feliciana Patriot, May 21, 1870.

⁴ Patriot-Democrat, July 10, 1875.

⁵ Ibid., March 24, 1877.

The Grand Tournament was organized and conducted after the general plan characteristic of such spectacles in other parishes during the period. D. T. Weill, chairman of the tournament committee, published preliminary regulations for the guidance of riders who wished to enter the contest. Each knight was required to register and pay a two-dollar entrance fee at least two days before the tourney date. Every knight was required to appear in "fancy costume," though masks were optional. Each entry was entitled to five tilts, the victor gaining the privilege of crowning the Queen "at the Fall at night."

The Patriot-Democrat review of the spectacle revealed the precision with which the Clinton Dramatic Club organized and conducted the activity through a successful and impressive performance.

The people of this Parish are indebted to the Clinton Dramatic Association for a very pleasant and interesting entertainment in the way of a grand Tournament which came off on the 5th inst. The grounds chosen and prepared for the exercises are situated on the Liberty road, near the northern limits of the town of Clinton. The course or tract was just 120 yards in length and perfectly straight and level. Along this course just 40 yards from each other were set three posts, each with a horizontal bar upon which was suspended by a wire about two feet in length, an iron ring some two inches in diameter. Convenient stands at appropriate places along the course had also been erected for the Marshal of the day, other officers and judges, and for the musicians. At an early hour crowds of ladies, gentlemen and children, five hundred in number, were upon the grounds eagerly awaiting the commencement of the exercises. A few minutes before 12 o'clock, Mr. K. A. Cross, Esq., the Marshal of the day, with the officers of the Dramatic Association, and the regularly listed Knights, ten in number, accompanied by the Clinton Brass Band, made their appearance upon the scene of action.

The Marshal then announced to the spectators that the Knights, mounted upon their steeds, with spear in hand, would each in regular succession pass over the course in ten seconds or less; and that

each would be entitled to five rounds upon the course, and that the Knight who should within the time required take upon his spear the greatest number of rings during his five rounds should be entitled to and receive the highest award of honor

The Knights presented an imposing appearance upon their richly caparisoned chargers, both Knights and horses being eager for the contest. And now the first horseman takes the course with spear in hand and at a given signal gives the reins to his impatient steed and all eyes are upon him as he passes along over the tract with the swiftness [sic] of the wind. The second Knight followed in about three minutes, and all the rest in their regular turns.

After the whole number of rounds had been completed the Marshal announced the decision of the judges as follows:

1st. That the first honor was awarded to Mr. Geo. T. Anderson, he having taken thirteen rings out of fifteen, and made all of his runs within the time required, and that the honor consisted in the privilege of crowning at the ball the following evening at Masonic Hall, the lady of his choice as Queen of the night.

2nd. The second award of honor was given to Mr. Courtney Going, consisting of the privilege of crowning the Queen's first maid of honor.

3rd. The third award was given to Mr. Joe S. Jones, Esq., he being allowed to crown the second maid of honor.

4th. The fourth award was given to Mr. L. B. Morgan, for having made his rounds upon the course in the shortest space of time, he having made the five rounds in forty seconds, entitling him to crown the third maid of honor.

The exercises were highly enjoyed by the crowd, especially on account of their being entirely new among us since the close of the war. The Marshal in a short but well timed and chosen speech thanked the audience for the encouragement which their attendance had given the gallant Knights, and for their approval of the manly and highly commendable sport of the day⁶

The Clinton Dramatic Association put into rehearsal two comedies, The Irish Attorney and Lend Me Five Shillings, shortly after the tournament and ball in April. The performances were given at Masonic Hall on May 31. On this occasion the association performed in an excellent manner, but the local editor believed they should receive larger audiences

⁶ Patriot-Democrat, April 14, 1877.

than those "which have heretofore greeted them."⁷

For their performance in July the Clinton Dramatic Association selected Aurora Floyd and invited Mrs. J. D. Austen of the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association of St. Francisville to play the title role. Mrs. Austen's theapian talents were well known in the Felicianas, and her consent to appear with the Clinton Club made July 10 a coming event.⁸

In 1877 the names which appeared in connection with theater performances in Clinton were Moses Baird, new with the club, C. R. Collins, G. T. Anderson, Sam Adler, Andrew Holmes, L. B. Morgan, E. L. Clifford, E. T. Worms, T. J. Hernan, G. M. Hochenedel, and H. L. Mayer. Nettie Worms, Emma Clifford, and Rhettta Waddell were identified among the female members of the acting corps.

Among these amateur theater people were those who were leaders in other social activities of Clinton during the decade. Sam Adler, for example, served as one of a committee of managers for the grand Masonic Installation Ball given December 27, 1872, at Masonic Hall. T. H. D'Armond, who had served as chairman of the Tournament Ball Committee, was one of the Floor managers of the same celebration. C. R. Collins, Sam Adler, G. T. Anderson and T. H. D'Armond were among the directors of the Grand Mask and Fancy Dress Ball given February 17, 1874.⁹

⁷ Ibid., June 2, 1877.

⁸ Ibid., May 26, 1877.

⁹ Printed Programs among the J. P. Knox and Family Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

The club gave an excellent production of The Seven Clerks and The Toodles on August 30, 1877, and the program was well attended. The audience demanded a repeat performance the following night, and attendance was again large. C. R. Collins and Nettie Worms gained the praise of the local reviewer for their work in The Seven Clerks, and Hochenedel and Rhetta Waddell were successful as Mr. and Mrs. Toodles in the afterpiece. Clintonians paid an admission fee of fifty cents to attend the association productions. This, the final appearance of the club of record, indicated a sympathetic and appreciative patronage.

The J. G. Stutz Dramatic Company played a week's engagement at Clinton's Masonic Hall in March, 1877. Their performances were generally satisfactory, but more important to the villagers of Clinton was the fact that "the members composing it (the company) were perfect ladies and gentlemen."¹⁰

After 1877 the files of Clinton papers become so intermittent as to furnish no practical aid in constructing a chronology of theatrical activity, either professional or non-professional. An increasing number of traveling professional companies visited the area during the cooler seasons of the year. The Dramatic Association had by 1877 established itself as capable of furnishing suitable entertainment to the citizens of Clinton. How long the leadership of the club was able to sustain its success cannot be determined.

¹⁰ Patriot-Democrat, March 31, 1877.

St. Francisville

The story of the non-professional theater in St. Francisville during Reconstruction is the combined stories of the Social Club of West Feliciana, The Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association, and the Pastime Dramatic Association. Soon after the war the Social Club was organized and early in 1869 completed construction of Social Hall, a small but welcomed place for community entertainments. Club members and especially their hall were prominent in programs benefitting Grace Church and the newly constructed Catholic Church in St. Francisville. In 1876 certain of the leading Social Club members with other interested citizens formed the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association. The following year the Pastimes organized. St. Francisville, where probably the earliest non-professional English theater organization in Louisiana was formed in 1811, was again a center of unusual community-produced dramatic entertainment.

In 1867 the editor of the Feliciana Ledger warned the people of the injudicious practice of patronizing touring professional theatrical organizations.

. . . Another show will be here in a few days to relieve the people of their small change. There seldom comes to any of the country towns a show of any merit, for the simple reason that when they have completed a series of exhibitions in the large cities they split up into small one horse concerns and take different routes through the country to gull the people out of what little change they may have left after bread and taxes are paid These shows come among us, gather every dime they can and leave without spending one cent with our people, and we should think it time that the people should look to their own interests before depositing their dollars to see a performance without merit and to listen to the stale and vulgar wit of a clown. It would be better to deposit your money for the education of the poor fatherless orphans among us than to see a show . . .¹¹

¹¹ Feliciana Ledger, March 26, 1867.

The editor's purpose was probably more to establish in the people at the time a greater self-reliance in meeting their present economic situation than to pronounce a bitter denunciation of the traveling circuses. In fact, the circuses continued to visit the small towns, and their patronage was little different. But there also grew up movements to repair the churches, the school buildings, reorganize social activities. The people themselves found ways to finance their charities. In rehearsing and producing tableaux, charades, in arranging concerts the people were not unaware of the development of their own artistic and cultural tastes.

The West Feliciana Courthouse served as theater for community activities in St. Francisville until the completion of Social Hall in February, 1869. In January, Grau's troupe of musicians and variety performers played a week's engagement to crowded houses.¹² The Social Club had begun at an unestablished date previously a "round of amusement and pleasure" which they hoped to continue at the Hall. C. L. Fisher, Chas. J. Howell, Theo. McK. Whiteman, and J. Hunter Collins, Jr. formed a committee to plan and conduct a fair at the new hall on February 22. Musicians of St. Francisville, probably an exclusive group of Social Club members, presented concerts on December 20 and 21. The funds were for a benevolent purpose.

Beginning in April, 1871, a series of benefit performances consisting of band concerts, tableaux, charades and an occasional farce furnished St. Francisville's theatrical fare for the next

¹² Ibid., January 23, 1869.

five years. The Catholic congregation of the parish sponsored several entertainments in financial support of a new building. On May 1, 2, and 3 a grand fair with evening theatrical entertainments was given. The fair was held at the Courthouse; evening concerts and tableaux performances were held at Social Hall. The Wilkinson Cornet and String Bands of Woodville, Mississippi, performed under the direction of Professor Meyer. A year later William Schneider presented the St. Francisville band in concert at the Catholic Church benefit on May 15 and 16. The program of tableaux on these evenings were selected and directed by Julia Linton.

A newly organized club of St. Francisville gentlemen entered the story of the community's theatrical activity late in 1874. Designated as the Home Social Club, this group was probably made up of those members of the Social Club of West Feliciana who lived in the close proximity of the village, or those more interested members who wished to keep the club actively engaged in the social events of the town. The new group sponsored an entertainment on October 22, 1874, of which nothing is know except that it was their "party" and that the citizens of the village expressed admiration for the "spirit and zeal" with which the young gentlemen entered into the project.¹³ Distinguished amateurs, according to the announcement in the Leader, appeared in tableaux at Social Hall on December 16 for the benefit of the Catholic Church; however, in the February 6 issue of the weekly the editor narrated that "at the solicitation

¹³ Dunn Leader, October 24, 1874.

of the gentlemanly Stage Manager of the Social Club, we repaired to Social Hall last night to witness the acting of the Amateur Troupe . . ." Annie Phillips, Hunter Leake, Percy Whicher, Dr. McCrindell and a number of other young men and women of St. Francisville were cited for excellent work in the three charades on the program. On May 14 a program reviewed as the Home Social Club's "second effort at dramatic performances" attracted a large audience to Social Hall. This second program was minstrel variety with music furnished by Prof. Schenck and the St. Francisville cornet band. Thomas Raynham, Ed D'Wibre, John Laboye and A. J. Reynolds were chief performers.¹⁴ On the program of November 12 the farce Ici On Parle Francais was added to the selected charades, and in December two productions were presented as church benefits.¹⁵

These miscellaneous dramatic and quasi-dramatic programs produced in St. Francisville since Social Hall was completed in 1869 served the charities for which the greater number of them were planned. They served further to prepare St. Francisville for organized non-professional theater. Tableaux, charades, comic song and dance routines, choruses--these were providing grounds for developing talent. Audiences learned to appreciate and enjoy the antics of the student thespians. Early in 1876 the amateurs organized the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association. A year later the Pastime Social and Dramatic Association began a series of productions, and until 1880

¹⁴ Ibid., May 8, 1875.

¹⁵ Feliciana Ledger, November 13, December 4, 11, 1875.

St. Francisville was entertained by more than a half dozen major theatrical productions annually.

On February 14, 1876, the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association gave its first performance. Social Hall was crowded. The program was light, had variety, and gained a favorable audience response. The result was recorded by the Ledger editor in his extended review a week later.

THE EDWIN FORRESTS.

The first entertainment of the above named Dramatic Association, took place at Social Hall on the 14th inst. The Hall was packed by the beauty and elite of the two towns who had evidently congregated to criticise the first appearance of the boys upon the dramatic stage. The performance was a representation of the "drama" entitled "The Persecuted Dutchman." The persecuted dutchman [sic] was personated by the inimitable Mr. Gus Brown; Mrs. Plantiful (the landlady) by Mr. G. L. Friend; Captain Blowhard, by Mr. P. E. Mock; Hon. Augustus Clearstarch, by Mr. J. G. Maguire; Cousin Soberly, by Mr. E. H. Bockel; Perseverance, by Mr. N. Aronstein; Teddy, by Mr. Theo. Friesca; Landlord, by Mr. Ed. Homerich.

The performance concluded with the comic songs "Belle of the Ball," by Mr. Gus Brown; and "Tim Flaherty" and "Duke Alexis" by Theo. Friesca.

To say that the critical audience were surprised and delighted beyond their most sanguine expectations, is but to give a faint and feeble expression of the grand success of the entire entertainment. . . .

The Club hope at an early day to be able to present an improvement upon their first attempt, and confidently hope to receive the approval and patronage of the community. . . .¹⁶

Four years later, in February, 1880, a correspondent to the Feliciano Sentinel, wrote "As a local organization, formed for the

¹⁶ Ibid., February 19, 1876.

development of dramatic talent and the pleasure of our people, the Forrests have proven eminently a success. . . ." The record tends to support the statement. From three to five programs were prepared each year by the club, and not infrequently were the programs given two performances. Plays selected for production were those of contemporary popularity because of entertainment values. The statement was as true of melodramas like Rough Diamond, Fruits of the Wine Cup, and Temptation as for standard farces like The Toodles, Handy Andy, The Dutch Immigrant and Happy Family. Theater audiences in cities and theater audiences in villages wanted to laugh and wanted to cry. Good productions of plays like those of The Forrest Club repertoire seldom failed to please.

To the eight names given in the cast of the first play produced by the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association eight others were added during the four years to 1880. Membership was restricted to young men, and during the first year and a half all plays were produced by all-male casts. Beginning with the program on May 14, 1877, the club enlisted the assistance of "talented" young ladies of St. Francisville and Bayou Sara. No evidence was discovered to indicate that the ladies were admitted to membership, though actresses always appeared in feminine roles from that time. With the somewhat restricted membership, the club was able to provide opportunity for every actor to perform in almost every production. And with experience naturally came a greater proficiency. Doubtless the theater-going public of St. Francisville and the neighboring area who attended the productions of the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association from 1877 to 1880 saw an excellent quality of non-professional acting.

In surveying the chronology of activities of the Edwin Forrests, one should remember that the Pastime Dramatic Association was producing plays in St. Francisville during the same period. Apparently a peaceful relationship existed between the two clubs. The Forrests with a restricted membership and the Pastimes with a welcome to all who wished to join them differed little in over-all objectives.

After the successful performance of the Persecuted Dutchman, only two other productions were reported for 1876. The Ledger reporter wrote in the issue of April 8 that the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association was preparing a program for April 24. "We have seen the young gens rehearsing, and can assure our readers that the performance will be good." A further comment which appeared in the issue of December 16 mentioned a planned performance during the month, and continued to say ". . . the entertainments of this association have ever been pleasant and amusing, and the plays performed with tact and ability, it is to be presumed that the forthcoming one will be characterized with the same degree of life and mirth. The club therefore, probably gave a number of plays during the first year.

In 1877 the Forrests secured permission to produce their plays in the hall of the Bayou Sara Fire Company. It provided a larger playing space and accommodated larger audiences than Social Hall on the hill. On January 16 Rough Diamond and Dutch Justice were the fare. Rainy weather and muddy streets prevented many patrons from attending; consequently, the program was repeated on January 27 at which time the farce Pick Turpin and "Several new character songs by Mr. Gus Brown" were added. A large audience

was present and the plays were well presented. Dutch Justice, probably an original farce, was "a splendid representation of the manner in which justice in this and other localities of the State since the war. . . ." had been administered.¹⁷

The Forrest Association continued the spring schedule with a Mardi Gras Masked Ball at the Bayou Sara Firemen's Hall on February 13. Followed then the May 14 presentation of Fruits of the Wine Cup and The Toodles, in which women first appeared in the cast of an Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association production. Mrs. J. D. Austen, wife of the editor of the West Feliciana Sentinel, gave a very satisfying performance and was subsequently invited to appear with the Clinton Dramatic Association in a production in July, 1877.¹⁸ None of the other feminine players were identified. Somewhat unusual, in fact, was the method of the Sentinel reviewer in neglecting individual mention of the young actresses. For example, his review of the November 6 program which included Temptation, a two-act melodrama, The Dutch Emigrant, an interlude, and the farce Quiet Family, disposes of their claim for honor in a sentence:

. . . Of the young ladies who took part in the performance it would be superfluous so [sic] speak in words of adulation. Their success was a foregone conclusion, and each and every one of them sustained and justified previous anticipations. With the young gentlemen, however, all of whom are entitled to commendation, we shall take the liberty to mentioning specially Messrs. E. H. Bockel, J. S. Sweetman, J. G. Maguire, and Gus Brown, as particularly deserving of credit for the splendid manner in which they acquitted themselves in their several roles. . . .¹⁹

¹⁷ West Feliciana Sentinel, January 20, February 3, 1877.

¹⁸ Patriot-Democrat (Clinton), May 26, 1877.

¹⁹ West Feliciana Sentinel, November 10, 1877.

This practice of identifying only the male members connected with the dramatic productions of the Forrests further supports the earlier assumption that the club was restricted to a rather exclusive group of young men of St. Francisville.

The November 6 production was given for the benefit of the Catholic Church of St. Francisville, and the same program was repeated on November 12 for the benefit of Bayou Sara Fire Company No. 1. According to the available record, these were the first benefit programs produced by the dramatic club. There were others for the fire company, and during the widespread yellow fever epidemic of 1878, the Forrests gave performances for the benefit of the relief funds of Baton Rouge and New Orleans.²⁰

Once each year the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association gave a complimentary performance. "Tickets of invitation" were issued to five hundred citizens of St. Francisville and surrounding parishes for the fourth annual complimentary entertainment on February 20, 1879. George M. Baker's One Hundred Years Ago was the feature of the program which included character songs by Gus Brown and farces, Smashington Goit and The Mischievous Nigger. Julia and Stella Cohn and Mrs. Austen took feminine roles in the plays. Gus Brown, J. G. Maguire, E. H. Bockel, W. D. Rogillio, and Max Sommers did outstanding work in the Baker play. James Vignes, a resident of Pointe Coupee Parish across the Mississippi from St. Francisville and a member of the Association, was effective as the French barber M. Friton in the

²⁰ Ibid., October 19, 1878.

farce The Mischievous Nigger. The Complimentary productions were followed by elaborately planned balls. Frequently dances followed the regular performances. The club sold refreshments during the evenings of the free performances and by this means were able to meet the costs of the productions.²¹

Few specific comments concerning staging and direction of the Edwin Forrest Association plays were made by the reviewers. The same stage scenery often served for a number of programs. There is no evidence indicating that the members included a scenic artist. For the productions of November 6, 1877, "the scenery, painted expressly for the Forrests by L. W. Seavy, of New York," was considered appropriate and "added immeasurably to the attractions of the evening and to the satisfaction and delight of the audience who justly appreciated the creditable enterprise of the Association in this outlay for their pleasure and amusement." H. Feltmeyer, a scenic artist of St. Louis, painted scenery especially for the Forrests' production of Brigands of Calabria and Among the Breakers, on July 5, 1878. The drop curtain of this set of scenery elicited special mention.²²

²¹ "A very large and handsome cake intended for the Forrest entertainment and presented to Mr. W. B. Rogillio, by a lady friend in Baton Rouge, which reached here two /sic/ late for the performance, was raffled at Firemen's Hall, on Thursday evening last and won by little Fanny Brown, an infant daughter of Mr. John Brown of this town. The proceeds of the raffle netted the Forrests \$16.00." Felicianas Sentinel, February 22, 1879.

²² West Felicianas Sentinel, July 13, 1878.

A brief comment appearing in the Sentinel of March 9, 1878, presents an indirect evaluation of the standard of direction the Forrest Dramatic Club received:

. . . Indeed our young friends fairly won the "blue ribbon," rendering the three admirably chosen plays, Handy Andy, Katrina's Little Game and Happy Family, with a faithfulness and vim that would do credit to more experienced and pretentious artists. So far as our observation extended, the casts were borne out substantially in every instance. There was none of that disagreeable drag so characteristic of amateur renditions generally the result of a want of study, but each lady and gentleman was "well up" in his or her individual part, thereby imparting an agreeable zest to the performances that can only be given when the proper application and study has been had. Promptness of entry and exit was another distinguishing improvement over former performances, while the several tableaux were rendered with exquisite taste and correctness. . . .

Though the club elected its officers annually in July, only those elected in 1878 and 1879 were listed in the weekly. The staff elected in 1878 included Wm. Homerich, president; W. D. Rogillio, vice president; Max Sommers, secretary; E. H. Bockel, stage manager; and Pius Levy, assistant stage manager. The group retained Homerich and Rogillio as president and vice president at the 1879 election. Henry Veigel became secretary; Gus L. Friend, stage manager; Gus Brown, assistant stage manager and business manager; and W. Gilmore, sergeant at arms.

On February 6, 1880, the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association presented Baker's four act drama Better Than Gold. This production was advertised as "The Fifth Annual Dramatic Entertainment" and, indeed, it did begin the fifth season since the rendition of The Persecuted Dutchman, on February 14, 1876. Appearing in the cast were many of the consistent members of the acting corps: J. G.

Maguire, E. H. Bockel, Max Sommers, J. S. Sweetman, Gus Brown, with assistance from Lillie Bell, Julia Cohn, Mary Homerich, and Frances Moll. Dot Quied Lotgings, an original farce by Gus Brown, closed the stage performance of the evening, and ended the long list of excellent productions of the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association of St. Francisville. A few of the members, under the name of the association, joined a like group from the Pastime Club for a benefit production of another George Melville Baker drama Above the Clouds in August, after which time both organizations appear to have disbanded.

The Pastime Amateur Dramatic Association of St. Francisville was organized in June, 1877. Identified as a social and dramatic association, the group advertised its initial program in July as a "GRAND BENEFICIAL ENTERTAINMENT and Social Reunion. . . ." Following its second performance in September, the local editor stated the aims of the organization to be ". . . the amusement of the community, the development and culture of dramatic talent and the fostering of charitable ends and interests."²³ The Pastime secured the use of an unused portion of the Odd Fellows' building on Principal Street in Bayou Sara and equipped it as an organizational club room. Business meetings were held there. Further, the room furnished a place where members met for the ". . . interchange of ideas and opinions."²⁴

²³ Ibid., September 29, 1877.

²⁴ Ibid., August 18, 1877.

When the Pastime Association was organized, the Edwin Forrests had been active for a few months more than a year. The activities of the two clubs complemented each other admirably. The former used large numbers of people in variety programs two or three times during the year while the latter club appeared to choose more carefully plays suited to the acting talents of its group for three to five more polished performances each year. The Pastime club's opening program on July 30, for example, included two one-act farces, False Alarm and Ici On Parle Français, special numbers of vocal music, and the Lamar Cornet and String Band of Woodville, Mississippi. Besides the visiting musicians, no fewer than eighteen St. Francisville citizens appeared on the program.²⁵ During the first two years all plays produced by the Pastimes were one-act farces: Behind Time, Poor Pillicoddy, That Rascal Fat, and A Conjugal Lesson were typical examples. Following each of the performances the group sponsored a grand ball or all-night dance. Plays selected during 1879 were two-act dramas with the programs closing with a farce. The Seven Clerks and an original burlesque called The Siamese Twins were produced on June 27; All That Glitters Is Not Gold and Les Miserales followed on August 19.

Membership in the Pastime Amateur Dramatic Association seemed to require only that the candidate show an interest in the activities of the organization. Between July, 1877, and the close of 1879, some thirty people appeared in casts of the Pastime productions. Twelve

²⁵ Ibid., August 4, 1877.

of these were women. During the period of activity of the Forrests only sixteen men and five women "coadjutors" formed the acting corps. The Pastimes and the Forrests afforded opportunity for acting to some fifty amateurs during their brief periods of activity.

Not only did the Pastime Club have the larger membership of the two dramatic associations, it also had a greater number who could direct activities. Officers were elected twice each year. The first leaders included Isadore Pallatsek, president; R. H. Haile, vice-president; N. P. Phillips, treasurer; F. E. Powell, secretary; Paul Decoux and Ben Leopold, respectively the stage manager and assistant. At the following election Ben Leopold became stage manager and T. A. Bakewell became his assistant. Paul Decoux was elected to the new office of assistant business manager. The mid-year election in 1878 resulted in J. P. Maguire becoming president. F. E. Powell, G. P. Kaufman, G. E. Miller, and F. V. Whicher served in the various other offices, with T. A. Bakewell being promoted to the position of stage manager and Paul Decoux becoming again the assistant stage manager. The final group of officers recorded took office in September, 1879. Among the new names were Sam Sackerman, president, L. F. Gerlach, stage manager, and D. S. Oswald, assistant stage manager. This constant shifting of members in the various offices of the organization indicated a healthy esprit de corps, though a new stage manager had little time to know his actors before he was balloted to a new position.

Certain conditions seemed to serve as a basis of comparison of the two dramatic clubs. The Pastime Association consistently had more extended reviews of their productions. More than half of the productions of the Pastime Club were benefit performances. The club

invariably had very large audiences, frequently playing to crowded houses. Many of the Pastime productions were for the benefit of Grace Church, The Fire Company, the 1878 yellow Fever Relief Fund. Of the patronage the statement from the review of the February 1, 1878, production of Peor Fillicoddy, The Obstinate Family, and A Confugal Lesson, given for the benefit of the Firemen is not unusual:

. . . From the moment their (The Pastime Amateur Dramatic Association) organization was effected up to the present time, they have devoted themselves to the work of furnishing chaste and enjoyable amusement to the public while the wants of charitable institutions have always been coupled therewith, and right noble have they acquitted themselves, but at no time more eminently so than upon the occasion of which we write. Firemen's Hall has never contained so large an audience as crowded its spacious floor to greet the Pastimes and evince their combined appreciation of the Association and our gallant Firemen, and although there was a "perfect jam" the utmost order and decorum prevailed. . . .²⁶

At the performance of The Seven Clerks and The Siamese Twins during the summer of 1879 "the applause of not less than six hundred people greeted the first scene. . ."²⁷ One factor which possibly had no small influence upon the number of people who attended the Pastime programs was what may be termed special events exemplified in the February production:

. . . The arrangements, in every department, whether we refer to the stage decorations, the refreshment tables so ably presided over by Mesdames Irvine, Whiteman and Mumford, or those for securing good order, were first class in every particular and reflect credit upon those who projected and carried them into execution. A special feature of the occasion was the raffle of a very

²⁶ Ibid., February 2, 1878.

²⁷ Ibid., July 5, 1879.

large and beautiful doll, known as Mollie Maguire. The beautiful dress was the work of Mrs. Dr. Mumford and Miss McQueen, and excited the admiration of all beholders. The raffle realized an unusually large amount, and resulted in the prize passing into the hands of the pretty little patroness of Bayou Sara No. 1, which eventuality seemed to please all. A fine cake, presented by Mrs. Mumford, was contested for by ballot between the four lady actors, all of whom signalized themselves by their excellent interpretation of their respective parts, Misses Estelle Cohn, Annie Basinsky, Emma Bakewell, Julia Cohn, and was voted to Miss Estelle Cohn, whose brilliant and accomplished acting always excites the admiration and awakes the appreciation of the audience. . .

The program was preceded by a parade led by the Bayou Sara Band, and a dance followed the theatrical performance. Thus the Pastime Club paraded, produced three plays, conducted the raffle of a prize doll, held a contest to determine the outstanding actresses of the evening, served a supper, and gave a dance in one evening!

Among the actors of the Pastime Amateurs Paul Decoux, Robert Montgomery, T. A. Bakewell, and D. S. Oswald most frequently appeared in the casts. Decoux, like Gus Brown of the Edwin Forrest Club, was an excellent comedian and always pleased with his comic songs. Estelle Cohn and Mrs. Austen were the most versatile of the actresses; they with Julia Cohn acted for both clubs during 1877-1879.

The Pastime Club produced only one play that demanded period costumes. This one, The Seven Clerks, however, presented no difficulty. According to the judgment of the reviewer of the performance, a feature which lent much to the success of the play was "the handsome costumes of the performers, manufactured by a lady resident of our town."²⁸ On other occasions, the choice of costume was probably left to the discretion of the actor.

²⁸ Ibid., July 5, 1879.

Extremely little is known of the stage equipment used by the Pastime Dramatic Association. Of the Edwin Forrests it was known that two sets of stage scenery were ordered from New York and St. Louis. These furnishings in all likelihood served for some of the Pastime programs. In October, 1878, the club announced a special benefit performance for Touro Infirmary of New Orleans, on which occasion new scenery "painted expressly for the Association" would be used.²⁹ The other mention made of the stage decoration was a reference to the "handsome drop curtain on which is painted life-size portraits of the nine mythological muses" in use by the club in August, 1879.³⁰

After that August, 1879, production the Pastime Dramatic club was unable to give another program. In May, 1880, the group announced in the weekly that the "Association contemplates giving a performance," but the plan did not materialize. In the July 31 issue of the Sentinel appeared the advertisement:

GRAND BENEFIT PERFORMANCE!

For the Catholic Church, to be given Thursday Evening, August 5, On which Occasion the FOREST AND PASTIME AMATEUR DRAMATIC ASSOCIATIONS, Aided by Talented Volunteers will present the Original and Romantic Drama, entitled, ABOVE THE CLOUDS in two acts. Also will be presented a Rousing Farce entitled NEVER RECKON YOUR CHICKENS, &C. The whole to conclude with a Grand Ball! Admission, adults, 50 cts. Children under 10 years, 25 cts.

In the review of the production published on August 7, the Sentinel diplomatically refrained from commenting upon the individual performers

²⁹ Ibid., October 26, 1878.

³⁰ Ibid., August 23, 1879.

in the names of their respective clubs. There was an extended synopsis of the action of the play. The cast was listed. Three--R. H. Hails, Jr., Ben Leopold, and Mrs. J. D. Austen--had appeared in previous Pastime Dramatic Association productions. Three--Jus Brown, John Maguire, and S. L. Friend--had appeared in previous Edwin Forrest Association productions. The "Talented Volunteers" included Henry Keessing, W. L. Stirling, Judith D. Hamilton, Estelle Hearsey, and Edith E. Friend. Socially, the editor believed, every one present admitted the entertainment a most signal success, while from a financial point of view the expectations of the management were more than realized.³¹

After the August 7, 1880, issue there was found no mention of either the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association or the Pastime Amateur Dramatic Association of St. Francisville in the weekly papers.

Miscellaneous Communities

During the years before 1880 Amite and Tangipahoa in Tangipahoa Parish and Greensburg in St. Helena Parish were small rural communities that provided themselves with theatrical recreation. The Society of Good Works of Amite, a young women's organization affiliated with one of the churches, conducted a series of charades and tableaux during April, 1876. In May the group organized the Amite City Dramatic Association. The Exotic Dramatic Association of Tangipahoa was active during the winter months of 1875-1876. And the citizens of Greensburg gave benefit dramatic performances during the same period, though no evidence of an organized group was found.

³¹ Ibid., August 7, 1880.

The Seiree given for the benefit of the Amite Methodist Church April 18, 1876, was successful "financially, socially, and morally," though the reviewer saw an "imperfection" in the costumes. Nettie Stewart directed the variety production, which included titles like Mind your Business, Just from the City, The Census Taker, Stage Struck, Frightened at Nothing. Lena McMichael, in the role of Joan of Arc, was given special mention for her work in the tableau of the trial.³² A second program of charades and tableaux was produced for the benefit of the Episcopal Church April 25. The dramatic program was presented by Mrs. Letard's Store, and included a temperance charade entitled Saved, a farce, Box and Cox, and a series of tableaux including a Fairies Scene from Midsummer Night's Dream. Other of the tableaux which placed great demands upon the costumer were Paradise and Peri in six scenes, and The Return of Columbus. Following the dramatic program, the audience was invited to the courthouse for refreshments and a grand ball. Mrs. Venables directed the tableaux, and Mrs. Imbau managed the charades. Charlie Stewart, Jr., who later became a prominent physician of Amite, was the outstanding actor of the evening.³³ The organization of the Amite Dramatic Association was effected in May, 1876, with C. S. Stewart as its first president. Joseph Illy was vice-president, David Stern, secretary, Henry Saal, Jr., treasurer; Thurston, stage manager. Henry Davis was director of the band which was made a part of the organization.³⁴

³² Amite City Democrat, April 22, 1876.

³³ Ibid., April 29, 1876.

³⁴ Ibid., May 27, 1876.

The Tangipahoa Exotic Dramatic Association is known through the review of a single performance. On December 10, 1875, the association played Dot, adapted from Dicken's Cricket on the Hearth, and a farce The Dutchman's Ghost. These productions, the visiting editor from Amite City thought, fell short of the standards set by the association's earlier programs. The Tangipahoa club was organized as a charitable association, and had developed a number of young ladies and gentlemen into creditable actors. Previously their plays were well selected and performed, and the group consistently enjoyed an encouraging patronage.³⁵ In the December production of Dot, Jennie Wall, one of the club's best actresses, carried the performance with substantial help from the acting of Mo Taylor, Mrs. Pearl McGehee, and Lizzie Ferris. The young men on this occasion did not merit comment. The afterpiece was not well presented, as the reviewer indicates:

The costumes were in bad taste, the characters not well selected, and the general acting not above sharp criticism; some of the actors not having thoroughly memorized their parts, which necessitated prompting. . . .³⁶

In January, 1876, the Amite City Democrat carried a brief announcement of a Grand Concert and Dramatic Performance planned by the citizens of Greensburg, St. Helena Parish, for January 14. A supper was a part of the entertainment, all receipts from which were to be given to the Baptist Church. Admission to the concert and plays was 25 cents; to the supper, 50 cents.

³⁵ Ibid., November 28, 1875.

³⁶ Ibid., December 18, 1875.

Community theater was without doubt of very great importance in the lives of the people during the Reconstruction period. Not only did theatrical entertainments provide needed financial support for the rehabilitation of institutions and for charity but they also promoted a healthy community-wide social relationship, thus bolstering morale at a time of extremely unsettled economic and political conditions.

The earliest entertainments in communities of the Florida Parishes following the Civil War were benefit programs sponsored principally by church organizations. Generally they consisted of tableaux, charades, and vocal and instrumental music. Since the object of the entertainments was to provide funds for the rehabilitation of community institutions, large groups of citizens participated in them. This active participation created community-wide interest in theatrical activity which motivated the subsequent formation of theatrical clubs. These theater groups formed firm organizations, electing staffs of officers annually or semi-annually. The club president, who sometimes served as business manager, and the stage manager were principal directors of activities. Concerning membership and over-all objectives, theater groups in the Florida Parishes during the period may be classified conveniently into two types. First, the organizations with small memberships whose objectives were the development of dramatic talents of their members and the entertainment of their patrons were exemplified by the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association of St. Francisville (1876-1880), and the Clinton Dramatic Association (1870-1877). They programmed a series of about six regular dramatic performances and one or two

public balls annually. The second type of community group, and the more prevalent of the area, had unrestricted memberships, presented fewer programs, but planned to afford a broader participation. They proposed chiefly to provide community amusements, to promote social intercourse for larger numbers of people, and to provide funds for civic and benevolent projects. Among organizations of this classification were Social Club of Feliciana (c.1866-1876), The Home Social Club (1874-1875), and the Pastime Dramatic Association (1877-1880) of St. Francisville; the Amite City Dramatic Association (1876- ?); and the Exotic Dramatic Association of Tangipahoa.

The programs by all groups usually included two or more plays which were currently popular in theaters throughout the country. Short farces and comedies proved more effective because audiences liked them better, and because total production requirements were met more readily by the amateur groups. The melodramas of George Melville Baker were frequently performed. Local vocal and instrumental music groups provided music for most programs, and character and comic songs by the company comedians were customary between plays.

Acting and over-all production excellence were better among the clubs of limited membership, since performers worked more frequently and appeared in a wider variety of roles. Many plays were probably presented with the same pieces of scenery. New sets were added to the Edwin Forrests' stage only twice during the four years of activity; each time the scenery and drop curtains were purchased from professional establishments in New York and St. Louis.

Theaters were provided by equipping various types of buildings with stage and scenery by local groups. Until 1869 the West Feliciana Parish Courthouse was the St. Francisville theater. The Social Club of Feliciana built Social Hall, a small theater, in 1869 and it shared productions with the courtroom until the Bayou Sara Firemen's Hall, a more spacious building, was equipped by the Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association in 1877. Masenic Hall was the Clinton Theater throughout the period, and Mrs. Letard's vacant store in Amite was used for theatrical performances in 1876. In any case, almost every community had a theater. The number of organized groups, the unusual quantity of productions, and the general enthusiasm of both performers and audiences testify to the prominence of the drama throughout the period.

CHAPTER VI

THE RED RIVER AREA

Alexandria

Very soon after the close of the Civil War traveling theatrical organizations were touring among towns along convenient waterways in Louisiana. Minstrel troupes, concert musicians, and circuses were among those companies to visit Alexandria and Natchitoches on Red River during 1866. Editors of local weekly newspapers published advanced notices of the coming entertainers, but they seldom commented on the performances. On the whole, the infrequent editorials were adverse toward the freely patronized companies in this and other areas of the state. Monies spent at the circus, at the minstrel performances, the editors believed, should be put to the use of more immediate needs of rehabilitating community institutions.

Local church and civic organizations found during the period before 1870 that entertainments planned and produced by their own organizations provided much of the financial aid needed to re-establish and continue their work. Theatrical activity thus begun stimulated greater interest in community amusements and led to the formation of amateur organizations. Before the end of 1866 Natchitoches citizens had formed a Philharmonic Society, and the young men had organized a minstrel troupe. In 1867 Alexandria's amateur minstrels appeared, and in mid-year of 1868 the Alexandria Thespian Association had launched

upon its brief, flourishing career.¹

The Alexandria Amateur Minstrels of 1867 were mentioned in the Democrat on January 16. "Tonight the Amateur Minstrels give one of their unique and spicy entertainments, and we bespeak for them a crowded audience." The fact that this was "one of their unique and spicy entertainments," does not permit the assumption that there had been previous performances or that others were planned for the future. Important at this time was the fact that young men of Alexandria were undertaking an organized effort to provide amusements to the town. January 16, the night of the minstrel program, was Wednesday; on Friday of the same week William Davis was scheduled to give a "dramatic and musical entertainment." Davis, according to the information of the Democrat writer, was a leading actor in the Alexandria Theater under the management of James S. Charles before the war,² and citizens "tendered him a complimentary testimonial on the occasion." Both the above mentioned entertainments were held at the Ice House Hotel Ball Room, the hall which the Thespian Association used for a theater from its beginning in August, 1868, through January, 1870.

¹ The Alexandria Thespian Association is discussed briefly as a community activity by William Highsmith, Social and Economic Conditions in Rapides Parish During Reconstruction, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1947. pp. 151-155.

² In reviews of performance by the Charles Company at the Rapides Theatre, Alexandria, from January to March, 1861, John Davis was stage manager and the leading tragedian of the troupe. The John Davis Family took a benefit on March 9. Mr. and Mrs. Davis played the Macbeths and Master T. Davis and Little Julia appeared as the Apparitions. (Constitutional, January 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, March 9, 1861.) The record of William Davis' engagement has not been preserved.

The Thespians of Alexandria, having organized in July and August, 1868, were one of the earliest non-professional theater groups in the state to sponsor a program of regular drama after the war. The Louisiana Democrat of Alexandria, published by E. R. Blossat, contains the record of performances in its advertising columns. Unfortunately, the editor wrote only a brief paragraph usually stating that the program advertised had taken place, and occasionally there appeared some mention of the patronage given the local club, but always there was encouragement in the tone of the comment. In support of the dramatic club's advertisement of its initial program, the editor inserted the following paragraph:

By reference to another column it will be perceived, that the Thespians, an Amateur theatrical corps recently inaugurated by the young gentlemen of our Town, make their first bow to the public on next Monday night. In these dull days, when amusements and recreations of all kinds are few and far between, we have every reason to hope that our discerning /sic/ public will look favorably upon this select entertainment of the Thespians and lend them their assistance and substantial aid. We bespeak, therefore for them, on their first appearance, a rousing and fashionable audience.³

In the above matter-of-fact announcement the new organization was first made known to the public. In the other column referred to appeared the advertisement of the first production—names of the association's officers, the place and date of the performance, the plays and the casts and the price of admission:

THESPIAN ASSOCIATION

Business Manager	W. J. Rogers
State Manager	J. Riley
Secretary and Treasurer . .	H. A. Blossat
Leader of Orchestra . . .	Prof. Chantz

³ Louisiana Democrat, August 12, 1868.

ICE HOUSE HALL, Monday, August 17th, 1868.

OVERTURE BRASS BAND

First appearance of the AMATEUR COMPANY, on which occasion will be presented the magnificent melodrama entitled: THE MOMENTOUS QUESTION! or THE FATE OF A SMUGGLER.

ROBERT SHELLEY (a Poacher) J. R.
 JAS. GRANGERFIELD (Game-Keeper). (H) B.
 UNION JACE (Gipsy) L. S.
 CHALK (an Inn Keeper) T. C.
 MOLETRAP (Poacher) H. H.
 RACHEL RYLAND (Village girl) . . W.E.S.
 FANNIE (servant) F.A.B., Jr.
 Villagers, Poachers, etc., by the Company.

OVERTURE ORCHESTRA

JIG DANCE J. E.

The performance will conclude with the side-splitting farce entitled: BOX AND COX! or THE TWO AGREEABLES.

BOX (a Printer) J. R.
 COX (a Hatter) L. S.
 MRS. BOUNCER F. A. B., Jr.

ADMISSION 50 CENTS

In rehearsal ROBERT MACAIRE and SWISS COTTAGE.

The August 19 issue of the Democrat contributed a single paragraph review of the performance, a commentary typical in length and content of those which followed the Thespian productions as long as the actors maintained their organization:

THE THESPIANS:—This association of Amateurs, composed entirely of young men of our town, made their appearance, "before any audience," on last Monday night, and we but reiterate the freely expressed opinions of all who were present, when we assert without reservation, that they, one and all, acquitted themselves handsomely and to the great gratification of a large, fashionable and appreciative audience. The pieces selected for

THESPIAN ASSOCIATION.

Business Manager.....W. J. ROGERS
Stage Manager.....J. RILEY
Secretary and Treasurer...H. A. BOSSAT
Leader of Orchestra.....PROF. CHANTZ

**ICE HOUSE HALL, MONDAY, AU-
GUST 17th, 1868.**

OVERTURE.....BRASS BAND

First appearance of the AMATEUR COM-
PANY, on which occasion will be present-
ed the magnificent melo-drama entitled:

THE MOMENTOUS QUESTION!

-OR-

THE FATE OF A SMUGGLER.

ROBERT SHELLEY (a Poacher)....J. R.
JAS. GRANGERFIELD (Game-keeper)...R.
UNION JACK (Gipsy).....L. S.
CHALK (an Inn keeper).....T. C.
MOLETRAP (Poacher).....H. W.
RACHEL NYLAND (Village girl)...W. E. S.
FANNIE (servant).....F. A. B., Jr.
Villagers, Poachers, etc., by the Company.

OVERTURE.....ORCHESTRA

JIG DANCE.....J. E.

The performance will conclude with the
side-splitting farce entitled:

BOX AND COX!

-OR-

THE TWO AGREEABLES.

BOX (a Printer).....J. R.
COX (a Hatter).....L. S.
MRS. BOUNCER.....F. A. B., Jr.

ADMISSION.....50 CENTS

☛ In rehearsal ROBERT MACAIRE
and SWISS COTTAGE.

LOUISIANA DEMOCRAT
Alexandria, August 12, 1868

their début were chaste, appropriate and interesting, and we are truly glad to record such success to the Amateurs, and hope that this is only a beginning of the many entertainments we are to be favored with in these dull piping times of peace and reconstruction. Due notice will be given of their second performance.

The puff, the advertisement in which is presented the evening's program, and the review of the first performance give little information to indicate a specific motivating force behind the Thespian organization. Initially the company was composed of young men of Alexandria. Although they gave a number of performances to benefit local enterprises and for charitable causes,⁴ the Thespian Association proposed first to furnish entertainment to the community. Occasionally, the group sponsored balls and other purely social events. They gave an elaborately planned Grand Fancy Dress and Masquerade Ball on February 8, 1869. These activities were few, but they served to create and maintain community good will toward the association.

The comparatively small, select membership of the Association, the regularity of performance, and type of plays chosen, indicate that this was a group of young actors who wished to establish a theater for themselves. They wanted an organization which would sustain itself financially, and one which would establish itself in the community through a consistently high quality of performance. Efforts made by the group later in their career to sustain and improve the

⁴ On October 1, 1868, a performance was given for the benefit of the Seymour-Blair Campaign Club, but the program was poorly attended. On January 27, 1869, the Thespians performed for the benefit of families of victims of a river steamboat explosion. Other benefit performances recorded were for members of the Club, or those in some way associated with its activities.

level of entertainment by enlisting aid from more experienced actors were consistent with the original objectives.

W. J. Rogers, the business manager, and Dr. Henry St. John, treasurer after August 26, 1868, were non-acting members of the organization. Jack W. Riley, the stage manager during the first year, Thomas Crawley, who succeeded him, and H. A. Blossat, the secretary, were the leading organizational members. Few of the other members have been identified other than by initials as they were listed in the casts. Only twelve individuals appeared in the productions of which the casts were given in the advertisements. L. S. (Levi Stewart) was the leading comedian, and W. E. S. and F. A. B. (F. A. Blossat, Jr.) consistently appeared in feminine roles. J. E., R. M. (R. Maddox), and A. R. (A. B. Rachal) usually acted secondary roles in the plays, and V. F. G. was the association's outstanding comic dancer. One juvenile, Master G., appeared in one production during the early months, and possibly was the K. O'Shea who was an active member of the association after 1870. Prof. L. Chants, an Alexandria music teacher, conducted the Thespian orchestra, and John Goulden, a commercial artist and painter, executed the scenery for the association productions.

The fact that Alexandria had sponsored active non-professional theater groups at intervals since 1820 was no doubt an inspirational factor in the organization of the present Thespian Association. During the 1830's the Alexandria Thespians had a Blossat who played feminine roles in their productions. K. R. Blossat of the Democrat and his brother H. A. Blossat of the newly organized Thespians were young men entering business at that period. In the absence of specific information which establishes them as members of the earlier group, it may be assumed

that Henry A. Blossat was in 1868 one of the leading individuals responsible for beginning the movement. His experience through the years, no doubt, proved a stabilizing influence in the company to make it a flourishing theater group. Nothing is known of Jack Riley's experience in theater; however, the fact that he was elected stage manager at the time the group organized indicates past experience. Thomas Crawley showed ability from the beginning and succeeded Riley as stage manager. That the young men elected non-participating individuals as business manager and secretary showed varied interests among the members and probably added greater financial stability for the association.

In July, 1869, the Thespians arranged with Johnny Allen, a young professional actor, to join the association for a time. Allen's fame as a portrayal of feminine characters reached Alexandria from Jefferson, Texas, where the young actor had recently played.⁵ Even with the addition of Allen, F. A. Blossat, Jr., and W. E. S. continued to play the feminine roles of less importance. Occasionally Henry Blossat appeared in feminine roles. Allen remained with the Thespian Association until early 1870, taking a final benefit on January 7.

Fannie Clifford, a young New Orleans actress, was a guest performer with the Thespians during September and October, 1870.⁶ She appeared in four productions, taking a benefit on October 20. In November Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Fitzgerald, experienced amateurs of Pineville, joined the association which underwent a re-organization at the time. The corps for the remaining short months of its activity was known as The Dramatics. For at least two

⁵ Louisiana Democrat, July 28, 1869.

⁶ Ibid., September 21, 1870.

performances in December another New Orleans actress, Mrs. W. H. Leighton, appeared with The Dramatics. During these last months of organized activity, the Thespians added three Alexandrians to their acting corps: William Leckie, probably of the family of Leckies first mentioned among the town's non-professional actors in 1836; M. O'Shee; and J. P. Grogan.

From the point of view of personnel, the Thespian Association had able leaders from the beginning of the organization. As time passed, those members of the acting corps who were inexperienced at the start had opportunity to become highly skilled performers.

A consideration of the Thespian Association programs from August, 1868, to December, 1870, reveals two striking facts. First, the number of productions was unusually large compared with other non-professional groups in the state during the Reconstruction period. Second, the policy in selecting for production plays which were standard professional repertoire during the period is closely followed.

A typical program for the Thespians consisted of a two-act comedy or melodrama, an interlude of acrobatics, dancing, or music, and a one-act farce. Only on three known occasions was the performance restricted to a single long play. Following this play the association gave at least thirty performances from a repertoire of thirty-three different plays. Three of the first four programs included The Momentous Question and Box and Cox on August 17; Robert Macaire and The Swiss Cottage on September 9; and The Golden Farmer and Loan of a Lover on October 9. After Allen joined the group a greater confidence was evidenced in the selection of plays which demanded a more sustained acting for their effect as exemplified in the following titles: Lucretia Borgia and The Day After the

Wedding on October 4, 1869; The Fiend of the Eddystone and Bombastes Furioso on October 16; Ingomar, the Barbarian on October 30; The Skeleton Witness and Nan, The Good For Nothing on November 17.

During the guest appearances of Fannie Clifford and Mrs. Leighton, the plays were probably selected from the repertoires of these actresses. Clifford, for example, appeared in The Last Man and Love in Humble Life on September 24, 1870; The Bride of Lammermoor and Bombastes Furioso on October 1; The Honeymoon and In and Out of Place on October 11; and The Hidden Hand on October 20. This last was a benefit in which Miss Clifford played "her favorite character of Capitola."⁷ Mrs. Leighton chose for her benefit on December 28, The Bride of Lammermoor and a farce written especially for her entitled The Fool of the Family.⁸

The single item suggesting original material appeared on the first program given after the Thespian sponsored Masquerade Ball on February 8, 1869. The performance was advertised as a benefit for Levi Stewart, the company's leading comedian. The first advertisement announcing the program for March 31 listed the plays as Toodles and Slasher and Crasher!, "The whole to conclude with the laughable burlesque of RUSSIAN BALL in which the whole Company will appear."⁹ A week later, the date of performance, the spelling of the title of the burlesque had been changed to "RUSH-IN BALL in which the whole Company will appear." The production probably re-enacted

⁷ Ibid., October 12, 1870.

⁸ Ibid., December 28, 1870.

⁹ Ibid., March 24, 1869.

the crowded Ice House Hotel Ballroom scene of a few weeks previous. The company no doubt appeared in masks and costumes, and with a minimum of dialogue pantomimed to the great joy of the audience the non-niceties of the over-crowded ball.

The people of Alexandria consistently patronized the theater. The "large, fashionable and appreciative audience" which greeted the Thespians on their first appearance included many who had watched the Devises, the Reas, and the Menkens before the war. In the Democrat's faithful paragraph after each performance the patronage given the Thespians gained a sentence. These consistently reported large audiences. There was ". . . A full, packed and jammed house, the beauty, fashion and intellect of Rapides having turned out to patronize them . . ." on September 16, 1868. ". . . They had a crowded and full house and acquitted themselves handsomely . . ." at the January 20, 1869 performance. The admission fee was established at fifty cents in the beginning. With a single exception it remained at that figure throughout period of the club's activity. At a benefit given for the Seymour-Blair Club of Alexandria on October 7, 1868, the price was raised to one dollar. The attendance was poor. However, the small audience may have resulted in part from the fact that both plays on the benefit program had been produced previously.

During the summer of 1870 the association suspended activities. After the first fall performance, in which Fannie Clifford appeared, the local editor reported a mild public response. "She was well greeted Let us hope that the Thespians will be encouraged and supported." Though there were signs of a diminishing

interest in the organization from within its own ranks before the end of November, 1870, the audience interest was tellingly lacking: "The character of the performance," wrote the Democrat editor of the November 26 performance, "merited a full house, and, though there was a sufficient crowd present to encourage and sustain the actors, it undoubtedly would have been a just compliment paid to them if the audience had been more numerous." The organization continued performances through December. Even then the discontinuance of the Dramatics was not in any great degree due to a lack of patronage.

In addition to the general characteristics of the Alexandria Thespian Association discussed in the foregoing, there are other interesting details which may best be presented in a chronological sketch of the period of activity. Information concerning stage equipment and effects, costuming, and acting excellence is extremely limited. Details of the organization which made it possible for members of the association to prepare themselves in such a great number of plays in such short spaces of time and continue their own vocations at the same period certainly would add to our understanding of this theatrical group. Conditions which gave rise to employing professional theater people can be only partially explained.

Between August 17 and October 9, 1868, the Thespians gave four performances. The casts included the same individuals who appeared on the program of the first program reproduced earlier in this chapter. On October 1 the group gave the financially unsuccessful benefit performance for the local political club. From October 9 to

January 13, 1869, there was no activity. "The Thespians have been resting on their laurels for some time back," the Democrat commented in the January 6 issue. Victor Hugo's historical drama THE CHAMBER OF DEATH¹⁰ with Why Don't She Marry! made up the program; and on this occasion certain members of the audience caused sufficient disturbance during the play to bring the following critical comment:

The THESPIANS gave their performance on the night of the 13th inst. They had a crowded and full house and acquitted sic themselves handsomely. But we are ashamed to be forced to admit that the audience and the actors were disturbed and annoyed by a few drunken, noisy and outlawed blackguards during the whole of the performance. The like conduct has never been seen in Alexandria before, and we are certain will never be permitted again. The decent people of the Town and the Thespians owe it to themselves, to see in future that these rowdies, who have no respect for themselves, much less for females, are kicked out of the Hall for their infamous and shameful conduct. Nothing short of this assurance will ever cause the ladies of the Town to visit future performances.¹⁰

At the following performances on January 27, the manager of the Association arranged to have the front seats reserved for the ladies; and an efficient police, under the superintendence of the mayor, was on hand to preserve order.¹¹ At the masquerade ball sponsored by the Thespians on February 8, ladies and gentlemen were required to unmask before entering the hall.¹² Announcements of theater programs continued to assure the public that precautions would be taken to preserve order. Thespian Manager Thomas Crawley's letter of acceptance of a complimentary benefit on November 17

¹⁰ Ibid., January 20, 1869.

¹¹ Ibid., January 27, 1869.

¹² Ibid., February 3, 1869.

emphasized that arrangements had ". . . been perfected with the Mayor . . ." by which order would ". . . be preserved at all hazards."¹³

These disturbances were probably in no way a malicious attempt to bring the Thespian Association into disrepute in the community. Rowdiness was a mark of the generally undisciplined Reconstruction period; and its appearance at the theater gained for it a greater prominence in the newspaper record of the times. On the other hand, the continued activity of the Thespians, even under the protection of the city police, emphasized the strong position occupied by their association in the town.

In the professional theater during the nineteenth century prominent actors added substantially to their earnings through the practice of complimentary benefits, proposed in many instances by the management of the theater at which the actor was playing. The theater-going public responded readily to the apparent benevolence on the part of the theater management, and the actor or actress being honored with the benefit usually selected for the evening's performance a play or particular role in which he or she had been favorably received. Under the most favorable conditions, complimentary benefits were a sort of hat-passing practice by which the beneficiary learned in a financial way how firm his footing was on the stage of the particular theater or community.

In the non-professional theater, on the other hand, complimentary benefit performances were given only to aid civic projects

¹³ Ibid., November 10, 1869.

in the community or to aid worthwhile objects of charity. The Thespian Association of Alexandria was an unusual exception to the rule. In the Louisiana Democrat for March 17, 1869, the following letter appeared above the signatures of twenty-eight prominent business and professional men of the town:

Alexandria, March 8, 1869.

Dear Sir--

Fully appreciating your efforts to please us, at the various performances given by the Thespians of this place, we propose giving you a complimentary benefit and shall be pleased to hear that the same meets your approbation; if so, please mention the evening best suited for the performance and your convenience. . . .

To Mr. Levi Stewart, Alexandria.

In the same issue Stewart's reply accepted the proposal:

Alexandria, March 16, 1869.

To Messrs. Osborn, Fellows, Began, Weil and others: Gentlemen--Your kind letter of the 8th inst., tendering me a complimentary benefit, is received, and it is with pleasure that I return my sincere thanks for this very flattering testimonial, and accept your proffered compliment. I would suggest Wednesday Evening, March 31st, 1869, as a suitable evening for the performance. Yours Respectfully, LEVI STEWART

Stewart's initials, L. S., had appeared in each of the seven plays given at the seven performances of the association since August the preceding year. For that matter, J. R., H. B., and others had also appeared in each of the plays. The editorial paragraph in the March 24 issue of the Democrat preceding the benefit performance suggests occupational problems of the beneficiary:

Our readers will please notice the programme of the Thespians, who give an entertainment on next Wednesday, the 31st inst. The night and the occasion have been specially set aside for a Complimentary Benefit to Levi Stewart, the leading Comedian of of the Association. We heartily concur in the appreciative motives of our fellow citizens, who are thus induced to come to the rescue of a worthy young gentleman in this substantial manner

The performance was a fine affair, the weekly reported on the following Wednesday; Stewart and the Thespians were greeted with the largest and most fashionable house of the season. Thus began, probably out of an economic necessity, a practice of giving complimentary benefits to members of the non-professional group. On October 30, J. W. Riley, the group's leading actor of serious roles, was favored with a benefit, and Thomas Crawley, who succeeded Riley as stage manager, was given a similar compliment on November 17.¹⁴ During this period Johnny Allen was appearing in the leading feminine roles of the Thespian productions. Between July 24, 1869, the date of his first performance, and January 7, 1870, Allen appeared in twelve productions, three of which were personal benefit performances. Fannie Clifford and Mrs. Leighton each took a benefit for their brief appearances. What other financial agreement was made with each of the guest actors is not known; moreover, the amounts they may have received from their benefit performances must be estimated from a single example.

On January 27, 1869, the association gave a performance for the families of Thomas Shepherd and his brother, Alexandria residents who were drowned as the result of a steamboat accident. Though the Democrat did not indicate the size of the audience, it pronounced the performance "a decided success." It yielded the beneficiaries one hundred and fifty dollars, from which fact it is estimated that the seating capacity of Ice House Hall was approximately three hundred.

That the Alexandria Thespians engaged professional actors to

¹⁴ Ibid., November 10, 17, 24, 1869.

work with their group was as unusual among Louisiana amateur theater groups as their practice of giving their members complimentary benefit performances. In one sense the practice is understandable: the association from beginning to end was an all-male organization;¹⁵ all of the professional people were engaged expressly to act in female roles. The seven months' engagement of the young comedian Johnny Allen served as an apprenticeship for him. His first appearance in Alexandria

¹⁵ The earliest instance of the appearance of an Alexandria woman in the production of a regular drama in Alexandria, according to the Democrat of June 3, 1874, occurred June 1, 1874, on which date Miss Williams and Miss Goulden appeared as Celia and Maude, respectively, in The Skeleton Witness. Miss Goulden also played Ernestine in Loan of a Lover, the afterpiece of the program. When the Thespians reorganized as The Dramatics late in 1870, the Democrat announced editorially that Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald were a "valuable and talented acquisition" to the company. Continuing the announcement of the group's reorganization, the writer commented on their first performance the preceding week in which "these artists made their maiden debut on the boards of the Town Hall. . . . Both made a decided and good impression on our playgoers. Both are good and talented performers, and are certain to become fast favorites here." The Fitzgeralds were living in Pineville at the time they were given benefit performances in 1876; however, the commentary cited above strongly supports the assumption that in November, 1870, they were new in Alexandria and that their connection with the Thespians was initially that of guest actors. In reviewing the November 26 performance of the new club, the Democrat editor wrote: "We think that the young gentlemen and ladies, who compose the Dramatics, should by all means receive the hearty support and patronage of the people of the town and country" The italicized ladies of the organization were those same young men who had been playing feminine roles since the beginning of the Thespian Association. The cast for Mrs. W. H. Leighton's benefit performance of The Bride of Lammermoor December 28 showed the beneficiary as Lucy Ashton and F. A. Blossat, Jr. as Lady Ashton. Mrs. Fitzgerald did not appear in either the feature play or the afterpiece.

merited the only complete review of a Thespian performance by the Democrat writer. The plays were The Seven Clerks and Toodles. In the first Allen's role was that of Victorine; in the afterpiece he appeared as Mrs. Toodles. The young actor found good advice in the review:

. . . Johnny Allen was the star of the evening. There was nothing wanting in the personation of his characters, failing to please the admirer of the "art dramatique." His make-up was complete; his dress in taste and fit was comme il faut /sic/. His action was natural, dignified and effective; his voice full, clear, well modulated, and his words, where feeling was needed, were full of pathos As passant, Johnny, a little candid and wholesome advice is sometimes of benefit to the young player. At the risk of displeasing we will give it. Avoid double entendres in a country theatre. You should remember that the ladies have fathers and brothers listening to you, and any sentence, even bordering on immodesty, is calculated to meet with keen disapprobation. This may do for the vulgar Pit in city theatres, but where all are neighbors and friends, it is in bad taste Toodles was the afterpiece. Johnny Allen, as Mrs. Toodles, was the soul of the piece. He possesses great versatility, as evinced by the change from Victorine to Mrs. Toodles,—Study, Johnny, and apply yourself to the profession—you will succeed. . . . 16

At the close of Allen's engagement in January, 1870, the Thespians became inactive until the following September, at which time Fannie Clifford began her series of appearances. The specific reason for the period of inactivity is unexplained. During that time, however, at least two pageant-like tournaments took place in Rapides Parish. The first was held at Cheneyville on May 6; the second, at Alexandria on June 3, 1870.

¹⁶ Ibid., July 28, 1869.

Upon reorganizing in September, the Thespians advertised that "having secured the services of an accomplished actress from New Orleans," the Association would perform at Town Hall on September 24. Clifford remained for four appearances, the last being her benefit on October 20. On October 27 the Thespians gave repeat performances of Toodles and Hombastes Furioso, after which they reorganized as The Dramatics, adding the Fitzgeralds to their group. Mrs. W. H. Leighton, from New Orleans, " . . . the truly accomplished comedienne and artiste, with able assistants," played a short engagement with the Thespians during December.¹⁷ In the December 28 issue of the Democrat the following correspondence appeared:

Alexandria, La., Dec. 23d 1870.

We the undersigned members of the Dramatics tender to Mrs. W. H. Leighton, a complimentary benefit at such time and place as she may designate. Signed: T. Crawley, M. O'Shee, W. M. Leckie, A. B. Rachal, J. W. Riley, F. A. Blossat, L. Stewart, J. Grogan.

Mrs. Leighton's letter of acceptance, also dated December 23, suggested December 28 as the evening for her benefit. The advertisement announcing the program also carried the cast—that of the last recorded appearance of the Alexandria Thespian Association, lately the Alexandria Dramatics, as an organization.

. . . The evening's entertainment will commence with the beautiful Drama, entitled: THE BRIDE OF LAMERMOOR! (Cast): Edgar Ravenswood, T. Crawley; Sir William Ashton, A. Rachal; Bucklaw, Wm. Leckie; Caleb, J. W. Riley; Craigengelt, C. B. Woodworth; Colonel Ashton, M. O'Shee; Clergyman, J. Y. Jallie; Lucy Ashton, Mrs. W. H. Leighton; Lady Ashton, F. A. Blossat, Jr.

¹⁷ Ibid., December 28, 1870.

Laughing Song, Mrs. W. H. Leighton.

The evening's entertainment will conclude, by particular request, with the laughable Farce, written expressly for Mrs. W. H. Leighton, entitled: THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY. Betty Saunders, Mrs. W. H. Leighton; Saunders, J. W. Riley; Oumpton, J. Y. Jollee [sic]; Zebulon, G. Fitzgerald.

Doors open at 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ —performance commences at 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ o'clock.
Adm. 50 cents, children, 25 cents.¹⁸

The degree of excellence attained by the Thespians of Alexandria probably would have challenged that of many professional theatrical companies of the period. Specific data to support that assumption, however, is not plentiful.

John Goulden, the scenic artist of the Thespian Association, died in November, 1869.¹⁹ He was succeeded by his son Jack Goulden. Nothing is known of their work for the Thespians, though Jack Goulden gained much favorable comment for his later work as a scenic artist. Attention to costume was manifest in only one report, and the acting of individual Thespians on two occasions was described in the name of the particular stage roles. For example, in the Allen production of The Seven Clerks,

. . . Adolphe DeBriancourt was well played, but the audience could not see it, so much are they accustomed to laugh at the funny man. Hans, the Dutchman, a robber of low degree, was also well and creditably played—but he must remember to dress his part according to his character—however, the audience seemed so pleased with him, that this fault was overlooked. . . . Claude Barnau played with his usual confidence and effect, and was well received by the audience, but we must venture also to him a little kind advice; always be up well in your part, as failing in this, puts everybody

¹⁸ Ibid., December 28, 1870.

¹⁹ Ibid., December 8, 1869.

else out Simon, that walking and starved specimen of anatomy, kept the audience in a continued titter. His character was well sustained but Simon, talk a little louder and clearer and your good sayings will be better heard and appreciated.²⁰

From the above commentary, it is known that the work of the Thespians on the stage during the particular performance pleased the audience. A year later, on October 19, 1870, "Old Boy" submitted an acceptable review of Fannie Clifford's appearance with the Thespians in The Honeymoon:

. . . I have attended every performance, and can say that the Honey Moon was their best performed piece, as a tout ensemble. It would have been a credit to the theatre of greater note, but for the unfortunate fault of the characters not being up in their parts . . . DUKE ARANZA, as usual, you played your part well, but not so well, had you been better up. Where you were perfect, your fine and sonorous voice had a good effect. DUKE, your forte is heavy business—light comedy is out of your special line. . . ROLANDO, you were the feature of the piece. You speak your part clearly and with a vim. There was some soul in your utterances, and the action suited to the word. . . .

Other characters were named and given similar compliments and admonitions. Clifford, who appeared as Juliana in the cast, was better than previously: "At your previous performances you lacked animation, but in Juliana you were very successful. Animation becomes you, and light comedy is your line. . . ." As individual performers the Thespians compared favorably with their professional guests, and the productions as a whole attained a degree of artistic finish sufficient to attract the attention of the experienced observer.

²⁰ Ibid., July 28, 1869.

No specific cause for the sudden suspension of activity on the part of the Alexandria amateurs was apparent. A summary of the general characteristics of the organization possibly suggests an economic difficulty. The troupe was made up originally of young men. There is no record of any effort on the part of the group to enlist the assistance of young women of Alexandria in their productions. A second striking characteristic of the group was the frequency of production which fact must have demanded more time for study than the actors could give. Followed then an attempt to relieve the financial needs of certain of the leading members through a series of complimentary benefit performances. By 1870 the more prominent members of the Thespian Association probably found their vocations demanding more of their time.

The last week in April began the series of theatrical performances in Alexandria which would have brought down the final curtain upon the home association which lacked the pure amateur spirit.

Since our last we have to announce the arrival in Alexandria, of Captain W. H. Crisp, with his talented family and other performers. They were at once retained and ushered before an Alexandria audience by the Dramatics and have, and are to give, a series of Histrionic entertainments. We have already attended three of their soirées, . . . and must express our great pleasure in having the privilege of witnessing such renditions of standard plays. . . .²¹

In ushering the Crisps into the theater the Dramatics ushered themselves out. On later occasions many of the familiar amateurs appeared

²¹ Ibid., May 3, 1871.

as actors or in other capacities in benefit performances. Always they were referred to as The Thespians. But their organization was not revived.

For the remaining years of the Reconstruction Period, non-professional theater in Alexandria consisted of infrequent benefit performances. No doubt visiting companies of professional players prevented the old Thespians' losing all interest in the drama.

The Crisps gave Richard III and The Dead Shot for their benefit May 8, 1871, and continued their circuit. In January, 1872, an attempt to prepare a production for the benefit of the Pineville Cemetery failed in the initial meeting called by the "Thespians."²² Two years later, however, the amateur actors gave two benefit performances, both of which were reproductions of plays from the repertoire of the Thespian Association. In February, probably the 10th day,²³ the Thespians gave a benefit for certain citizens of Grant Parish who were imprisoned in New Orleans at the time. The hall was "crowded with the fine and appreciative audience . . . and the acting, take it all in all, was good, and evinced good taste and talent of no rare merit. Good music, fine scenery, well selected pieces, good acting, and above all things in behalf of a righteous cause. . . ." The second of the performances was given at Exchange Hall, the old Ice House Hotel Ballroom under a new management, on June 1. The plays were long in preparation, the Democrat

²² Ibid., January 17, 1872.

²³ Ibid., February 11, 1874.

of April 25, announcing that the "talented and energetic young townsmen, the Thespians, are waiting for the arrival of Mrs. Edson, who with Mrs. Fitzgerald, and perhaps some of the Alexandria young ladies, is to assist them in the performance." Thomas Crowley served as business manager for the production. Acting in the production with Crowley were William Leckie, A. B. Rachal, J. W. Riley, J. P. Grogan, and the Fitzgeralds from the old troupe. This was the first record of young Ladies of Alexandria appearing in regular drama on the stage of their town. Miss Williams and Miss Goulden "made their first appearance on the Amateur Stage on this occasion. . . ." ²⁴ The performance was given for the benefit of the Sisters of Mercy Convent. The Thespians "brushed-up" their roles in The Skeleton Witness and The Loan of a Lover, added to their ranks the two young ladies, D. T. Stafford, Wm. P. Marsh, F. Bouillotte, Jack Goulden, and Jno. Graham to replace the old actors who were missing. The Democrat review of June 3 commented favorably on the new scenery:

. . . We must make closing and special mention of our Jack Goulden, the Scenic Artist of the Thespians. An appropriate and artistically painted new Prison scene, with wings and border, attested our young artist's genuine skill.

During 1875, local theatrical activity was restricted to two variety performances arranged by church groups, and a tournament and ball conducted in connection with the parish fair in September. The Ladies of St. John's Church planned a program of "charades, dialogues and music, 'with supper and refreshments extra,'" at W. C. Yarborough's residence on Bayou Rapides on March 31. The ladies of St. James' Church

²⁴ The Caucasian, June 6, 1874.

gave a similar performance at Exchange Hotel on May 20. The performances ". . . had for representatives the very recherche of our matrons, young ladies, girls and young men of the Parish. . . . All seemed up to the importance of the occasion, and some really excelled in their parts, the more practices and regular performers of the day."²⁵

On February 8, 1876, the Thespians again worked under Thomas Crawley's management to present Lucretia Borgia and Slasher and Crasher! for the benefit of St. James' Church. During the closing weeks of January and early February, a professional company under the management of J. C. Stutts, played an engagement in Alexandria. Their troupe included Helen D'Este, C. V. Basye, Ida Lewis, W. H. Cooper, D. Peyser, F. M. Cottrill, G. Griffith, H. Gray, Toler Wolfe, and Rosalie and Ada Gray. Many of these people became important figures on the professional circuits during a later period; Helen D'Este, Basye, and Lewis became the stars of their own companies. Within a week after the troupe continued to Natchitoches for an engagement,²⁶ the amateurs gave the St. James' Church benefit.

In May, 1876, Ben Turner of Pineville completed a new hall in the little village across the Red River. When forty Alexandrians tendered a complimentary benefit to the Fitzgeralds, who lived in Pineville, the beneficiaries accepted, suggesting June 26 as the date and naming Turner's new Hall as the place of the performance. Captain James Graham ". . . tendered the services of himself and his Ferry Boat to carry all persons to and from the Performance Free of Charge!"²⁷

²⁵ Louisiana Democrat, May 26, 1875.

²⁶ Ibid., February 2, 1876.

²⁷ Ibid., June 7, 1876.

Two literary societies in Alexandria during the Reconstruction period deserve mention in the survey of the town's non-professional theater. The Phoenix Literary Society, organized in May, 1869, was active at the time the Thespian Association was flourishing. Oratory, debate, and discussion were the society's principal activities. The group met weekly on Friday evenings, and visitors were welcomed to their program. On May 14, the debate topic was "Has the United States arrived at the zenith of its Greatness?" On June 4, the society debated the subject of "Theatrical Performances, whether they were detrimental to public morals or not." In discussing these and other equally broad topics, the Phoenix Literary Society members probably provided highly entertaining programs for fellow-townspeople.

The Minerva Literary Club, active at the close of the period, served the non-professional theater of the community by introducing several new actors who became better known as entertainers during the last two decades of the century. On May 30, 1879, the club sponsored an entertainment of music and charades. Chief among the performers was J. M. Hetherwick, a rising young merchant of Alexandria, who impersonated Mrs. Susan Witherspoon, a farmer's widow, in the initial charade entitled Servant and who took the role of Adolphe Levejoy, a city fop, in the following play called Rivalry. G. DeGeneres, Rees Spreigel, Kate Hold, A. Albert, Miss Clark, and Mr. Ryan were prominent members of the Minerva Literary Club's variety entertainment.²⁸

Although the closing years of the Reconstruction served as a definite tapering off period for non-professional theatrical

²⁸ Ibid., June 4, 1879.

activity in Alexandria, the early years of the period marked the most flourishing interval of amateur production of which there is a record in the growing Red River town.

Natchitoches

Compared with those of Alexandria, attempts to organize a non-professional theater group in Natchitoches immediately after the war were less pretentious. During 1866 the young men's Philharmonic Society was active, its first public notice being that of a serenade honoring the local editor on April 1.²⁹ On July 3 the Philharmonics and the Minstrels of Natchitoches gave a benefit performance for the Allen Monument Fund.³⁰ The first part of the program consisted of a variety of musical numbers including the then popular Roses of Natchitoches, played by the band. The minstrel troupe combined with the band to present an assorted program of comic vaudeville, which concluded with the farce The Artist. Although the seating capacity of their St. Denis Street Hall is unknown, the crowd filled it to "overflowing" on this occasion.

²⁹ Natchitoches Times, April 4, 1866.

³⁰ H. W. Allen, inaugurated Confederate Governor of Louisiana in January, 1864, served that part of the state not controlled by the military government until the fall of the Confederacy. In June, 1865, he addressed a farewell message to the people of Louisiana; afterwards he moved to Mexico where for a short time he edited a newspaper. He died there on April 11, 1866, (See Fortier, History of Louisiana, IV, pp. 43, 62-65.)

Adults paid one dollar and children fifty cents.³¹ Reviewing the performance in the July 7 issue of the Times, the editor complimented the music of C. L. Dranguet and E. and A. Cloutier. Among the actors whose comic antics greatly pleased the audience were Albert, Myers, Mill Haller, Hyams, Donellan, Mouton, and Buard. Donellan was the scenic artist for the occasion, having designed and painted a new set of "canvasses" for the program.

Combining their talents again on July 14, the Philharmonics and the Natchitoches Minstrels gave a similar program at the St. Denis Ball Room for the "benefit of the poor and destitute of Natchitoches." Again the performance was creditable; but the audience was small, a characteristic feature of second and third performances of amateur minstrels in their home communities. On July 24 the troupe traveled by steamer to Shreveport where they gave two performances for the Allen Monument Fund. The trip was not a financial success.³² The Minstrels added new acts to their repertoire, including an original burlesque entitled The Battle of Chicamega, and gave a final program at the St. Denis Ball Room on August 16.³³

In January, 1867, Victor Durand, the proprietor of the building in which the Ball Room was located on St. Denis Street, started alterations which by May had transformed the "dear old

³¹ Natchitoches Times, June 27, 1866.

³² Ibid., August 4, 1866.

³³ Ibid., August 18, 1866.

Ball Room" into "Six large and commodious offices." The Natchitoches Parish courthouse, in which Correl's professional minstrels and Miss Coss' Opera troupe played a year earlier, again became the community theater. On May 8 and 9 the Ladies of Natchitoches presented a two-evening program for the benefit of The American Grave Yard. Advertised as Tableaux Vivants, the performances included original drama, dramatic readings, oratory, and music. "The stage arrangements were admirable, the costumes splendid and appropriate, the music excellent and the performance spirited and beautiful," the review of the programs began. Five-year-old Eliza Dranguet, the "little Misses Payne," Emily Pierson, Mrs. Litton, and Mrs. Flough were applauded for their performances in various musical numbers. Amey Bullard was featured in comic lectures, Chester Chaplin furnished an original farce, which "was well presented by the actors" on the first night, and the performance closed with an address written expressly for the occasion and delivered by eight-year-old Charley Wolfson. Mrs. Boyce directed the program.

Mrs. Mary E. Bryan, co-editor of the Natchitoches Times, wrote a tragedy and a comedy for the local actors. The tragedy was scheduled for the program of May 8 and 9; it was withdrawn because of illness in the family of one of the principal actors.³⁴

For the interval between June, 1867, and June, 1874, none of the Natchitoches weeklies have been preserved. It was during this period, according to a sketch of the fire company's history

³⁴ Ibid., May 15, 1867.

published in 1881, that the members of the Independent Perseverance Fire Company Number 2 of Natchitoches organized a theatrical group to produce a series of programs for the benefit of the firemen's hall.

. . . Forming a Histrionic Association, they gave a series of performances which ultimately secured a fund sufficient to erect a very neat theatrical Hall, with stage scenery & c., commodious enough to accommodate those who loved amusements of this kind. The City aided in the construction of the Hall. . . .³⁵

It should not be assumed that a flourishing non-professional theater sprang suddenly into being in Natchitoches. During 1866 and the first half of 1867, there was a complete lack of leadership and interest in the regular drama. Mrs. Bryan and Chester Chaplin, whose original scripts were mentioned earlier, probably were among the most active of the group. Members of the fire company probably managed the business of the group. When community interest in the local talent shows began to diminish, the firemen petitioned the town council for financial aid to complete their project.

Briefly during 1874 there was in Natchitoches an attempt to establish a club which assumed a purpose other than benevolence. The first notice of the group's existence appeared in the Vindicator of July 25:

THE JUVENILE ENTERTAINMENTS.--Our youth have been giving us the pleasurable entertainment of a series of Dramatic exhibitions, in which they evince no little talent. We congratulate them, and as marked improvement is shown at each succeeding presentation, we can but hope they will continue. They are amusing to the audience and very instructing to the performers, as it tends to give them self-confidence and to develop their memories. Tonight a bill unusually attractive will be presented, and we bespeak for them a good house.

³⁵ The People's Vindicator, October 8, 1881.

Members of this group are unidentified. Since terms were loosely used in the weekly papers, it can be assumed that the items which made up the "Dramatic exhibitions" ranged from comic songs and readings by individual performers to short, light plays. At the entertainment given by the group on August 3, Jos. Kile and Dr. A. P. Breda assisted the young actors. The former was a comedian whose specialties were comic dramatic readings and character songs. Breda led the string band at the juvenile variety shows.³⁶ Little is recorded of the activities of this group of young people, but significantly, their performances were designed to serve the pleasures and development of the performers themselves.

On December 26 a group of young men, experienced in minstrel routines, joined members of the Natchitoches military company to give a performance at Firemen's Hall. The actors sustained their characters well, according to the People's Vindicator; hence, the group became known as the Natchitoches Home Minstrels.

Late in 1875 a movement was launched to build a high school in Natchitoches. A fair was planned and conducted for the benefit of the project in December. Lacoste's building on Front Street was equipped for the fair. The Home Minstrels performed in the same building, supplementing the fair program.³⁷

Occasional visiting professional performers provided the theater in Natchitoches during the period from 1876 to 1879.

³⁶ Ibid., August 8, 1874.

³⁷ Ibid., December 18, 1875; January 1, 1876.

Cook's and Dan Rice's circuses came for performances during the winter of 1875-1876.³⁸ J. G. Stutt's company was scheduled in Natchitoches in February, 1876. Helen D'Este, one of the stars of the Stutt Troupe, returned with her own company for a two-weeks' engagement in Natchitoches beginning on December 25.³⁹ Possibly the convenience of the professional theater deterred greater amateur activity during the period. The single non-professional performance was planned by the ladies of the town for the benefit of the school. Dates of the two-evening program are indefinite. On February 24 the weekly announced the plan for "Tableau, Concert and Dramatic plays." The issue of May 19 reported that the proceeds of the first night was \$27.25 and the second night, \$45.95.

The final years of the Reconstruction period were troublous throughout the state generally. Natchitoches Parish was one of the more unsettled of the areas, and it is not unusual that the weekly editors showed little interest in the more peaceable social activities of the parish seat. Of Helen D'Este's engagement in 1877 one of them had written: "We are sorry however, that a combination of circumstances work d against their (the company) pecuniary success this visit. Political excitement, the murder of Mr. Garza, the visit of the Congressional Committee, all deterred many

³⁸ Ibid., December 25, 1875.

³⁹ Ibid., January 6, 1877.

from attending their really fine exhibitions."⁴⁰

Certainly not all community entertainments were recorded in the weekly paper. The situation or events which motivated the organization of the Natchitoches Minstrel Troupe in May, 1879, were not apparent. Several young men met at the telegraph office, the Vindicator of May 10 reported, formed a minstrel company, and elected officers. A. D. Wright was made president and stage manager; Joseph Kile, assistant stage manager; Numa Tauzin, musical director; and W. H. Turnard and M. H. Wilkinson were chosen secretary and treasurer respectively.

The group presented their first variety show at Firemen's Hall on June 9, and the patronage was encouraging. On June 18 they performed again, presenting a somewhat varied program which included an original farce entitled Black Status. Ware, Noonan, Kile, J. E. and Jerome Messi, and Wright "surprised the audience in the manner they carried themselves through this play. . . ."⁴¹ Bones and Tambo, with their original "puns" on local issues, Vinas, the dancer and "magician," and well chosen popular music by the company made the Natchitoches Home Minstrels a welcomed organization---for two performances.

It is, therefore, apparent that the people of Natchitoches were unable to sustain an organized theater group at the time. In 1866 the combined efforts of the Philharmonic Society and Amateur

⁴⁰ Ibid., January 6, 1877.

⁴¹ Ibid., June 21, 1879.

Minstrels were successful in producing a series of three benefit performances. After the St. Denis Street Ballroom was converted to an office building in 1867, the fire company was instrumental in organizing a number of citizens, who gave a series of performances to finance the building of their hall. A group of young people in 1874 for the first time since the war undertook a series of theatrical programs for no purpose other than their own development and enjoyment. The minstrel troupe was revived as the Home Minstrels in December, 1874; and a year later they again appeared for a single performance. The third minstrel organization during the period in Natchitoches appeared in 1879. Their organization, as it was reported, was more stable. The group made greater efforts to produce a variety of entertainment which contained much material that was original and which was adapted to their home town audiences.

Miscellaneous Communities

Brief records of amateur theatrical productions in three of the smaller communities along the Red River during the Reconstruction period have been discovered. Chaneyville's Trinity Church congregation advertised in Alexandria's Louisiana Democrat a program of Tableaux and Charades for November 26, 1868. The program showed a number of similarities with the fair and dramatic events of October, 1860, which was held at the Randon House Hotel and sponsored by the congregation of the same church. The absence of historical subjects among the tableaux was the chief deviation.

Spirit of Religion, Peasant Family in Repose, Rebecca at the Well, and The Gypsy Camp were the representative tableaux listed in the program. Comedy was the keystone of the charades: Many a Slip Between the Cup and the Lip, Stage Struck, and Matrimony were among the titles. Admission to the performance was one dollar; the supper served after the program also cost one dollar. Cheneyville probably had other programs of tableaux, charades, possibly regular drama on occasion; but if records of these activities exist, they will be found among private journals and letters of the period. Cheneyville had no weekly paper.

Simmesport in eastern Avoyelles Parish had an active organization of young people who produced theatrical entertainments in 1879. A. D. Harmanson, who lived near Simmesport, wrote an invitation on April 27, 1879, to Dr. J. R. Hawkins:

. . . Let me know about what time I may expect you so I can meet you at Simmesport. There will be some 1st class neighborhood theatrical performances at Simmesport on next Friday week. Simmesport can boast of having the finest Debating Society in the Parish if there is another in the parish I do not know it. It is composed principally of young men, and they are mighty plucky. All speak takes sic them a long time to get to the point. 6 or 8 on a side; consequently they keep late hours. . . .⁴²

Harmanson does not specify two separate organizations--a dramatics club and a Debating Society. It was not the usual combination of activities. The tone of the writer's narrative indicates that both groups were interested in an activity which afforded self improvement and wholesome recreation.

⁴² A. D. Harmanson, letter dtd April 27, 1879, to Dr. J. R. Hawkins. The J. E. Hawkins Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

It is through a single letter that the existence of a Thespian Society at Springville in Red River Parish⁴³ in 1866 was recorded. The group was evidently organized to provide funds with which to establish a mail delivery route from Natchitoches to Springville

Springville, August 4, 1866

MR. DUPLEIX, Dear Friend--I have the pleasure to inform you that our concert last night by the Celebrated Springville Band and Thespian Society, was a perfect success. The house was crowded, and nett [sic] proceeds amounted to \$357.75.

We have made arrangements to carry the mail, once a week, from Natchitoches to this place, paying the small sum of \$400. To make up the deficiency, it was moved and seconded that your friend Mr. Dupleix of the Natchitoches Times, should make up the balance in Natchitoches, which motion was carried unanimously.
 . . . Respectfully, Your Friends.

SPRINGVILLE BAND
 THESPIAN SOCIETY.

Young men in both Natchitoches and Alexandria formed amateur minstrel companies soon after the end of the war, beginning the most lively period of non-professional theater activity in the Red River area during the century. In Alexandria the Thespian Association began regular productions at the Ice House Hall in August, 1868. About the same time the volunteer fire company at Natchitoches sponsored the formation of the Natchitoches Dramatic Club. The Alexandria Thespian Association, like the Edwin Forrest Dramatic

⁴³ Editor Dupleix of the Natchitoches Times, to whom the letter was addressed, commented that he hoped the "citizens (of Natchitoches) will follow the example and assist the inhabitants of Springville in establishing a regular mail line between this point and Coushatta Chute. . . (Natchitoches Times, August 8, 1866.)

Association of St. Francisville, consisted of a limited membership of about fifteen young men who proposed first, to provide for their own amusement and cultural development, and second, to furnish a program of regular dramatic entertainment for the community. Names of only eleven individuals appeared in the casts of their numerous productions. The other three members, W. J. Robers, Dr. Henry St. John, and Prof. L. Chants, served respectively as business manager, treasurer, and music director for the organization. All feminine roles were taken by the young men until late in 1870, when two New Orleans actresses were engaged for brief appearances. During the three-year period of its activity the Thespian Association gave some thirty performances consisting of thirty-three currently standard theatrical pieces. The plays were more frequently comedies, though melodramas were prominent among the repertoire.

After the St. Denis Street Ballroom was converted into business offices in 1867, the people of Natchitoches held their public entertainments at the parish courthouse. The need for a theater motivated the volunteer firemen to organize a dramatic club which gave a series of dramatic programs to finance building Firemen's Hall. A Juvenile troupe, composed of children and young people in their teens, and two other minstrel companies were successful for brief periods. The community, however, was unable to sustain a single theatrical organization over any extended period. Members of the Springville Thespian Association (1866), like the Natchitoches Firemen's Dramatic Club, organized to finance a civic project-- a rural mail route from Natchitoches to their community.

Two additional types of community amusement during the Reconstruction period contained significant theatrical elements. Pageantry featuring costuming and actions of medieval chivalry was prominent in tournaments conducted at Cheneyville and Alexandria during the 1870's. Rules of the field and the grand coronation balls given in the evenings followed closely those of classic lists as they were reported by Sir Walter Scott. The second type of quasi-theatrical amusement characteristic of the period was that provided by literary clubs. The Alexandria Phoenix Literary Society and the Minerva Literary clubs, and the Simmesport dramatic club and debating society included in their programs activities which had wide appeal and entertainment values. The Minerva Club and the Simmesport group included theatrical productions. General community-wide programs of music, tableaux, and charades, usually sponsored by local church and school groups not only succeeded in furnishing entertainment for great numbers of people in the various communities, but also contributed to the general development of appreciative understanding of theater by making it possible for greater numbers of people to participate.

CHAPTER VII

THE BAYOU COUNTRY

Community interest and enterprise in the towns of the southern Bayou Country immediately following the close of the Civil War moved steadily toward the relatively high cultural and prosperous condition which had existed before the secession. The Mississippi River, Bayou Lafourche, and Bayou Teche were waterways open to the Gulf. Early in the war the United States Navy gained control of these waterways; consequently, towns along these streams experienced directly the demands made by war where war is fought. Very adequate files of three weekly papers from this area are preserved: the Iberville South of Plaquemine on the Mississippi, the Sentinel of Thibodaux on Bayou Lafourche, and the Courier of Opelousas near Bayou Teche. In these weekly newspapers, which began publication immediately after the war ended,¹ are contained the records of the persistent efforts of the people of the bayou country to reconstruct what had been destroyed during the war. Local government officials were appointed, of course, by the state Reconstruction government. Citizens' influence in the administration of government was present in varying degree in the separate municipalities. What was more important to the people, however, was the rehabilitation of their churches, their schools, and the general cultural improvement of their communities.

¹ The Opelousas Courier is one of the few weeklies in the state that continued publication, though intermittently, throughout the war period. For a time wall paper was used for newsprint. Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, has a number of these papers in its collection of rare newspapers.

Community theatrical programs during the first five years of the Reconstruction period were planned and produced to raise funds for benevolent purposes. Later civic projects rose in importance and municipal fire companies were organized and equipped, sidewalks were built, and street drainage and general health projects were sponsored. Collective effort in providing funds through theatrical entertainments was characteristic through the area.

By 1870 groups in Plaquemine, Thibodaux, New Iberia, and Opelousas had organized dramatic clubs. During the following decade the number of organized groups increased, and their activities assumed broader scope. In many instances funds derived from performances continued to be distributed to benevolent uses; however, objectives of the organized clubs shifted emphasis from that of raising funds for community projects to that of providing worthwhile entertainment for their communities and of promoting the cultural development and training for their members.

The types of theatrical entertainment were varied. During the early years of Reconstruction vocal and instrumental music were prominent. Each community showed great pride in its band organization. Dramatic readings and platform lectures were frequent. Tableaux Vivants and one-act farces were often performed on the same program. Standard drama was not undertaken with regularity during the early years, but during the 1870's, after groups had gained experience in management and performance, regular drama became the dominant type of entertainment.

THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI

Donaldsonville

In July, 1872, the Crisp Theatrical Troupe played an engagement in Donaldsonville at the Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band Hall, the earliest recorded theatrical activity in the Ascension parish seat since the end of the war. The professional company arrived in Donaldsonville on July 9. On July 13 the Chief reported that the troupe had been playing to small but appreciative audiences. On the evening of July 20 Crisp's company played Lady of the Lake for the benefit of the Donaldsonville Band. The performance was attended "by a large audience" because "the universal popularity of the band always brings out our people in force to any entertainment given in their honor."²

This enthusiastic community support had enabled the Silver Cornet Band to become sufficiently prosperous to undertake building a theater for the community. Few details are known about the theater. According to the notice of the Sheriff's sale of the property in August, 1877, the D. S. C. B. Hall was a frame building constructed on a lot leased from Ascension parish and located on North Hounas Street, opposite the Louisiana Square. Apparently the band's building project was financed by Simon and Rodolphe Braud, since it was to satisfy judgments in suits against the property brought by these two men that the Hall and its equipment were seized and sold at auction.³ That the theater was built with main floor

² Donaldsonville Chief, July 27, 1882.

³ Ibid., August 11, 1877.

and balcony is indicated by the Crisp's entrance fees: "to the dress circle, one dollar; second tier, fifty cents."⁴

D. S. C. B. Hall was new in 1872. Whether the Crisp Company was the first theatrical troupe to play there is not known; however, a week after the departure of the professional company, members of the Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band discussed a proposal to organize a dramatic society, "the original members of which are to be taken from the band, others being admitted upon application after the organization is fully effected."⁵ A week later the Chief announced that the D. S. C. B. Theatrical Association had been organized.

. . . It is divided into two branches, one of which is to render dramatic performances in French, the other in English. The French branch of the society held their first rehearsal at the D.S.C.B. Hall Wednesday night, and it passed off so well as to indicate that the organization will prove a gratifying success. . . .

Details of the organization--membership, leadership, officers, and purpose or objectives--are missing from the available record. The group gave its first performance on September 14, 1872. This first program was made up of Le Vagabond, a one-act French drama; The Golden Farmer, a two-act English comedy; and Les Deux Aveugles, an "amusing opera bouffe from Offenbach." The second program was planned for October 5, at which time the French Branch was to give the two-act drama entitled Un Loup de Mer and the English Branch, the two-act farce The Spectre Bridegroom.⁶

⁴ Ibid., July 13, 1872.

⁵ Ibid., August 3, 1872.

⁶ Ibid., September 21, 1872.

THE D. S. C. B. HALL,

Donaldsonville, La.

Will be opened to the public

Sunday Evening, Sept. 22, 1872.

Upon which occasion will be presented by the honorary and other members of the Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band, assisted by a number of their lady friends,

A Dramatic Entertainment,

Consisting of a French Drama entitled,

THE VAGABOND;

An English Comedy called,

THE GOLDEN FARMER;

The evening performance to conclude with a Comic Opera called,

THE TWO BLIND MEN.

Doors will be opened at 7 o'clock P. M.; performance commencing at 8.

Admission, 50 cents.

Tickets will be sold at the D. S. C. B. Hall ticket office from September 7th to September 14th.

THE CHIEF

Donaldsonville, August 24, 1872

Of further D. S. C. B. Theatrical Association activities nothing is known. Scattered issues of the weekly during the succeeding years of the decade, however, indicate that certain members of the group took active part in dramatic programs for various causes. On November 2, 1873, the D. S. C. B. Association sponsored a variety benefit program which "was by no means as great a success as such an affair should have been, either in point of a meritorious performance or large attendance of spectators. . ."⁷ On May 26, 1874, a group of Donaldsonville actors referred to as the Amateur Dramatic Club, presented a French-English program for the benefit of the Louisiana flood sufferers. Le 100,000, a three-act English comedy, and Les Deux Rivaux or Un Mariage Au Bayou, an original one-act farce by Dr. M. Claverie of the club, made up the successful production which netted \$126.50 for the flood sufferers.⁸ July 3 and 4 were dates of an elaborate theatrical benefit honoring the Donaldsonville Episcopal Church. A series of tableaux with interludes of vocal and instrumental music made up the first evening's program. Le Chalet, a French operetta, and Husband to Order, two-act serio-comic drama, were produced on July 4.⁹ In its August 29 issue, the Donaldsonville Chief announced another Amateur Dramatic Society program to be given "in a few weeks." A French operetta and an English comedy were again selected: Le Dragon de Villars and Taming a Tiger.

⁷ Ibid., November 8, 1873.

⁸ Ibid., May 30, June 6, 1874.

⁹ Ibid., July 4, 11, 1874.

In May, 1877, the Donaldsonville military company sponsored a variety program of music and drama for its benefit. A Napoleonville editor reported attending a dramatic troupe production at D.S.C.B. Hall June 23.¹⁰ Two individual benefit programs, and two school benefit programs were produced during the year. During 1878, dramatic activities in Donaldsonville were limited to two brief visits of a professional company on January 13, and on February 3, 4, and 5; and the commencement plays of St. Joseph Academy in August. Here the record ends.

The available evidence indicates Donaldsonville had a number of citizens capable of providing leadership for non-professional theatre. J. J. Claverie, a store proprietor, and his brother Dr. B. Claverie gained popularity for their performances and direction of the French Branch of the D. S. C. B. Theatrical Association and later dramatic clubs during the decade. Director of the English Branch of the Theatrical Association was Bernard Lemann, another Donaldsonville merchant. He was assisted by William Klopman and John A. Cheevers, an attorney. Fifteen men and women made up the acting corps of the French group, and at least thirty names appeared in one or more casts of the English productions during the decade. Four of the actors—Moise Levy, Sabin Braud, Andrew Gingry, and Mrs. Marx Israel—were successful performers in both French and English productions. Later in the decade the Misses Maggie and Lylie Hanson, local teachers, and D'Evereaux Jones, principal of St. Joseph Academy, were prominent leaders of dramatic activities. Jones planned and

¹⁰ Pioneer of Assumption (Napoleonville), June 30, 1877.

directed the students of the academy in their benefit and commencement programs, which included both French and English plays.¹¹

Contemporary reports of the first productions of the theatrical groups and of the local band concerts indicate a large and enthusiastic patronage by the community. The French operettas were consistently popular. The Claverie Brothers, Mrs. M. Israel, Sabin Braud, Arthur Gingry, Jules Gondren, David Israel, and Armide Claverie gained wide praise for their performances in Le Chalet, Le Violonneau, and Les Deux Aveugles. On the other hand, only general comments, usually complimentary, were given the performances of the French and English plays. Of the one-act French play Le Vagabond: ". . . Suffice it to say that all did inexceptionally well, that no balks or mistakes were apparent, and that the drama was rendered throughout in such a manner as would reflect credit upon a professional troupe."¹² Of The Golden Farmer, the English piece played the same evening, the comment was "Of the rendition of this beautiful drama we may say the same as of the first: It was as near perfection as could be, and delighted and surprised every body." However, the opera bouffe proved to be the most popular part of the program.

. . . The evening's entertainment concluded with Les Deux Aveugles (The Two Blind Men), . . . which was performed in a splendid manner by J. J. and Dr. B. Claverie, and brought down the house several times in outbursts of applause. The Messrs. Claverie are first-rate actors, whom few professionals can eclipse, and their histrionic and musical talent makes them invaluable members of the dramatic society. . . .

¹¹ Donaldsonville Chief, October 6, December 8, 1877; Aug. 11, 1878.

¹² Ibid., September 21, 1872.

Efforts were made on occasion to meet the difficulties which naturally arose from these bilingual productions. The weekly newspaper printed a detailed plot summary of the operetta Le Chalet preceding its production "for those not acquainted with the French language."¹³ Such summaries may have been a regular department in the printed programs of all community productions. In reviewing the performance of Le Chalet and its companion piece, Husband to Order, the editor of the Chief commented at length on individual characterizations. Of the operetta he thought it "decidedly a success, and the audience was immensely pleased with it." In summarizing the total program effect, the editor wrote that ". . . No more successful or satisfactory performance has ever been given in our town, and we are glad to see the merit of our amateur dramatists so deservedly appreciated by the public. . ."¹⁴

The Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band and its associated dramatic association were unable to continue payments on their hall in 1877. Suits were brought by the creditors and the property was sold at auction August 25.¹⁵ Charles Gecks, a New Orleans hotel

¹³ Ibid., July 4, 1874.

¹⁴ Ibid., July 11, 1874.

¹⁵ Ibid., August 11, 1877. "SHERIFF'S SALE. State of Louisiana, Fourth Judicial District Court in and for the Parish of Ascension. Simon Braud vs. No. 1920, Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band. Rodolphe Braud vs. No. 1921, Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band.

By virtue of and in obedience to two several writs of fieri facias, issued by the Hon. Fourth Judicial District Court. . . and to me directed, I have seized and will offer for sale at public auction to the highest bidder, at the Court-House of the parish of Ascension, . . . on Saturday the 25th day of August, 1877. . . the following described property, to wit:

A certain improvement, lying and situated on parish lot in the town of Donaldsonville, in the Parish of Ascension, on

proprietor and former resident of Donaldsonville, bought the property for \$1650, retained the lease on the lot, and made the theater available for rent to both local civic organizations and traveling theatrical companies.¹⁶ Approximately two months later, on November 3, Rodolphe Braud, creditor, caused the instruments of the band, "consisting of fifteen German Silver Pieces, one Bass drum, one pair of cymbals," and a Silver Serving Set to be sold at auction. "Mr. Braud was the highest bidder in each case, securing the instruments for \$130 and the silver set for \$60."¹⁷ The dissolution of the Donaldsonville band and theatrical organization was complete.

Plaquemine

Organized dramatic activity in Plaquemine began with the formation of the Plaquemine Dramatic Association about 1870. As early as 1866 a group of young people gave a two-performance production of Goldsmith's The Good Natured Man for the benefit of St. John's Church. Two years later a similar production was prepared for a similar purpose. Music groups during these early years of Reconstruction, usually under the leadership of a local music teacher, formed organizations which became central units in the conduct of community entertainment.

North Houmas street, opposite the Louisiana Square, consisting of a frame building known as the Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band Hall; also the benches, scenery, etc., in said hall, the fence, one cistern, and the privilege of the unexpired lease of said lot on which the above improvements are situated. . . . P. A. Jones, Sheriff."

¹⁶ Ibid., September 1, 1877.

¹⁷ Ibid., November 3, 1877.

The Minvielle Band sponsored an Invitation Ball on August 21, 1865. The entertainment was held at LeBlanc's Hall; it was described as one of those "good old-fashioned gatherings."¹⁸

On January 8, 1867, the volunteer fire company sponsored a benefit ball at Orillion's Hall to supply needed funds for the organization. Admission price was one dollar for each gentleman. In February the following year Prof. J. Bonning, a former Plaquemine band director, organized the Plaquemine Brass Band.¹⁹ Professor Bonning and the Plaquemine Brass Band performed at the occasional dramatic entertainments and gained sufficient notoriety to be invited to take part in the New Orleans Firemen's parade in March, 1868.²⁰

For their first theater after the Civil War, the people of Plaquemine equipped a hall over a store on Main Street, identified only as that "formerly occupied by Ross & Gallagher."²¹ The Good Natured Man productions on February 1 and 3, 1866, were the first entertainments given there. For the first evening's performance admission was one dollar. Reserved seats were advertised at two dollars. Prices were reduced to 50 cents for the second performance. Though the play was described as "poorly attended" by one correspondent, the South reported that after paying all necessary expenses

¹⁸ Iberville South, August 26, 1865.

¹⁹ Prof. J. Bonning taught music in Plaquemine during the period before the Civil War. He organized and conducted the Plaquemine Creole Band and the Biehler Band during that time. After the war Bonning lived in Baton Rouge, where his music organization was an important unit of the Baton Rouge Thespian Corps organized in August, 1866. (West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, September 1, December 22, 1866. See also Varnado, A History of Theatrical Activity in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1819-1900, p. 34.)

²⁰ Iberville South, February 1, 1868.

²¹ Ibid., January 27, 1866.

the program manager paid "between two and three hundred dollars" to the Church fund. If it is assumed that the sum collected accrued from the sale of admissions, the hall probably afforded an adequate seating capacity.

On February 9 O. K. Pate, a resident of Grosse Tête and an "old soldier," gave a program consisting of a lecture and dramatic readings. The lecture, entitled "Mechanical Faces," supported the theme that "a man is the architect of his own face." The review, addressed to the editor of the Iberville South by a correspondent identified as "PHI," indicated the speaker sustained his argument in a "manner easy, natural and impressive." The dramatic reading which followed the lecture was "good and tasteful," and the reader's delivery was "excellent." The audience was small,²² a fact which may explain in part the lapse of two years before another performance was reported at Ross and Gallagher Hall.

Under the general management of Rev. Father D'Hemecourt, a group of Plaquemine citizens prepared a second benefit performance for St. John's Church on February 5 and 6, 1868. Laurent Cheri, "as scenic artist, stage manager, and musician," was the chief individual in planning and producing the play. Professor Bonding and the Plaquemine Brass Band took part in the performances. No other members of the group were named, though the editor stated that the entertainment reflected "great credit upon. . . every actor and actress in the drama."²³

²² Ibid., February 24, 1866.

²³ Ibid., February 8, 1868.

The next record of a public entertainment in Plaquemine is that of a musical concert held at the New Study Hall of the Academy of St. Basil and sponsored by the Sisters of Holy Cross on October 28, 1876.²⁴ During the years between 1868 and the closing months of 1876, a period for which none of the weekly newspapers have been preserved, the volunteer fire company had built the Union Fire Company Hall, and the people interested in non-professional theater had organized the Plaquemine Dramatic Association. In the issue of February 3, 1877, the Iberville South carried an advertisement which was probably indicative of the type of theatrical activity that had gone on during the preceding years.

Grand Carnival Festival by the Plaquemine
Dramatic Association, at Union Fire Co. Hall.
On Mardi Gras Evening, February 13, 1877.
Drama, comedy, Farce. Amusement, Fun, Frolic.
Music, Singing, Dancing, Refreshments. Mas-
querade and Fancy Dress Ball after Performances.
Admission 50 cts. Children 25 cts.

The carnival festival did not take place as scheduled;²⁵ however, on March 24 the editor announced: "The Plaquemine Dramatic Association, that popular institution of our town, is coming again to the front in the way of supplying the people of this parish with recreation and amusement. . . ." Earlier in March a second dramatic association was organized among the young men of Plaquemine who proposed to appear ". . . before the public in a variety performance."²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., October 28, 1876.

²⁵ Ibid., February 17, 1877.

²⁶ Ibid., March 17, 1877.

Nothing further was reported concerning the activities of this new group. Some years later, however, the appearance of competing organizations was frequent.

Performances by the Plaquemine Dramatic Association were announced for April 7 and for May 26; the funds from the entertainments were to be used to clear an indebtedness on the Union Hall piano. On May 19 the group made an appeal through the weekly newspaper for greater public support, stating that ". . . this, the oldest of our Dramatic Associations" had met with ". . . severe reverses this past season in consequence of the bad weather that prevailed at their three last performances."

During the following September the Plaquemine Dramatic Association accepted an invitation from the Conference Memorial Association of Baton Rouge to join the Baton Rouge "Amateurs" in a two-evening program for the benefit of the Memorial Association. According to arrangements, the Baton Rouge actors were to present The Honeymoon at Pike's Hall on September 28, and the Plaquemine Association was to appear in the feature play of the program on September 29. In preparation for the guest appearance, the Plaquemine Association performed before a home audience at Union Hall on September 27. The Plaquemine performance did not go well: the musicians did not appear, the audience was extremely small, but the acting of "a new lady member cast in the play" was rewarding. The review of the Baton Rouge performance is lost; however, some months later, when the theatrical association became inactive for a time, the Iberville South confirmed the appearance of the company in quoting from the Baton Rouge Herald:

THE PLAQUEMINE DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION.--

We regret to announce to our readers that the above Association has disbanded. The people of Baton Rouge will long remember its visit to the Confederate Memorial Association, the late entertainment given by the latter for a purpose which will ever be held sacred in the hearts of those who were interested in the lost cause. We learn that outside meddling with the internal discipline of the association was the cause of its dissolution.²⁷

During the months of the inactivity of the association, a group of young ladies were directed by Alfred Schmidt, a resident music teacher, in a production of the operetta Maud Irving. Schmidt staged the play at Union Hall on February 2 for the benefit of the Convent of the Holy Cross. Minerva Dardenne, an active member of the Dramatic Association, sang the role of Maud Irving and "sustained throughout the play her well merited and deserved reputation as an amateur actress. . . ."²⁸ Such members of the old association as were concerned with community entertainment continued their activity in theatrical productions during the following years. It became characteristic, however, that a request from another organization or an invitation to the group to participate in the entertainment plans of other projects motivated the productions of the Plaquemine Dramatic Association after 1877. On June 11 and 12, 1878, St. John's Church sponsored a fête champêtre and invited the dramatic association to present a play each evening.²⁹ An epidemic of yellow fever interrupted all activities during the fall months of 1878; however, the

²⁷ Ibid., February 16, 1878.

²⁸ Ibid., February 16, 1878.

²⁹ Ibid., June 8, 15, 1878.

Dramatic Association reorganized to perform at a second fete champetre sponsored by St. John's Church on May 6 and 7, 1879. On the following May 20 and 21 the association appeared a second time at Pike's Hall, Baton Rouge, again on invitation of and for the benefit of the Confederate Memorial Association.³⁰

Few of the plays given by the Plaquemine Dramatic Association during this period were identified in newspaper advertisements. The Black Chemist and Old Gooseberry, two farces, were the plays given on June 10 and 11, 1878, and were in keeping with the spirited jollity created by the general fete champetre atmosphere. The afternoon amusements were conducted in the vicinity of the courthouse lawn and included sack races, mule races, gypsy tent, post-office, and fortune-telling. There were many tables of food. The two afternoon and evening sessions of the fair netted the church \$750. The May 6 and 7, 1879, productions given in connection with the spring festival sponsored by the Catholic church, were restricted to "short farces—it being the object of the Directors not to keep the auditors too long from the tables." A tableau in which John H. Shanks and his three children sang Old Black Joe drew specific comment by the weekly newspaper correspondent.³¹ For the Baton Rouge appearance on May 20 and 21, the Plaquemine Dramatic Association prepared Sunshine Through the Clouds, The Fellow Who Looks Like Me, The Seven Clerks, Betsy Baker, and The Literary Wife, an original

³⁰ Ibid., May 24, 1879.

³¹ Ibid., May 10, 1879.

farce created by the association.³² To contribute further to the fund of the proposed Confederate Monument, the amateurs gave The Seven Clarks and The Literary Wife at Union Hall in Plaquemine on May 17. Admission was fifty cents, and the net receipts amounted to ninety-one dollars.³³ According to the Baton Rouge review, reproduced from the Daily Advocate in the May 24 issue of the Plaquemine Iberville South, Pike's Hall was crowded in excess of seating capacity each evening. From this review it is known that the following citizens of Plaquemine were regular members of the Dramatic Association: John H. Shanks, editor of the Iberville South, Charles Biehler, Dr. R. A. Kearny, J. L. Dardenne, M. E. Gourrier, M. L. Levy, Mrs. W. J. Walter, Minerva Dardenne, Nora Sharp, and a number of juvenile actors including Eddie Hill, Edwin Grass, Phil Postell, Logan Postell, and Seppie Postell.

In June the juvenile dramatic club known as the Fire Fly Dramatics published a note of thanks to John H. Shanks for "his disinterested kindness and for assistance rendered our juvenile organization."³⁴ Possibly Editor Shanks' three children who appeared with him in the tableau described above were members of this juvenile dramatic group. Perhaps John Shanks organized and directed the group. The juveniles who appeared in the Baton Rouge production were cast in The Literary Wife, the original play. It may have been written for the Fire Flies. During June the juveniles

³² Ibid., May 24, 1879. See Varnado, op. cit., p. 34.

³³ Ibid., May 17, 24, 1879.

³⁴ Ibid., June 21, 1879.

reorganized, changing the name of their club to the Young Men's Dramatic Association. Paul Labauve was chosen president; Edward Hill, secretary; and Charles Petit, stage manager. The amount of training the members of the youth groups were given during the last years of the Reconstruction period was probably slight. A number of those members who began in the Fire Fly organization became active members in adult productions during the period which followed. During the period between 1860 and the end of the century, children's operettas were a popular form of entertainment in Plaquemine.

Although the records of non-professional theater in Donaldsonville and Plaquemine are preserved only in the rather scattered files of weekly newspapers, it is evident that consistent work was done during the Reconstruction period by organized theatrical clubs. In Donaldsonville the Silver Cornet Band and Dramatic Association faced the problem of entertaining a bilingual audience. The organization attempted to meet the problem through its two-branch organization which presented both French and English plays on every program. Operettas were more successful than plays; however, interest was not sustained and the drama-music organization became inactive in 1877. In Plaquemine the dominant language was English. The Plaquemine Dramatic Association, which probably grew out of occasional benefit productions between 1865 and 1870, gained sufficient notoriety with its activities to merit invitation to appear with the Baton Rouge Thespian Association in a Confederate Memorial Association benefit in 1877 and on a second occasion in 1879 the Baton Rouge Memorial Association asked the Plaquemine group to give benefit performances on successive evenings. The Organization of the group was not

publicized, though efforts were made by unidentified contemporaries to establish competing dramatic clubs. As an organized unit the Plaquemine Dramatic Association showed evidence of instability. During 1878 and 1879 the group was successful in producing effective entertainment, but on every occasion the club became active in response to specific invitation of benevolent or church groups. By the end of 1879 the Plaquemine Dramatic Association was no longer an independent organization.

BAYOU LAFOURCHE

Thibodaux

Civic and religious organizations in Thibodaux during the early years of Reconstruction financed the revival of their community activities through a variety of theatrical productions. Concerts and balls, programs of tableaux vivants, charades, and plays were planned and produced with a general increasing regularity during the first five years of the period. The volunteer fire company, the various church groups, and the private schools alternated in giving benefit entertainments. In 1871 a group of young men gave a series of plays. The following year they appeared in minstrel varieties, and in 1874 the group organized under the name of The Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche. The club secured the use of an unoccupied building and fitted it into a theater, which they called Waverley Hall. In 1877, when the dramatic club performances became less frequent, another group of young men of Thibodaux organized the Young Men's Social Club. The Social Club also produced theatrical entertainments, but their interests were more varied than those of the earlier

Dramatic Club of Lafourche. In the meantime, members of the congregation of St. Joseph's church organized the St. Joseph's Dramatic Club, an active group during 1878 and 1879. Near the close of the period in 1879 the Social Dramatic Club organized with the stated purpose of studying the drama and giving occasional representations. From the beginning of the post-war period the people of Thibodaux evinced a community-wide interest in public theatrical entertainments.

During 1866 two elaborate community entertainments were produced. Both were benefit programs: the first, on February 9, was a ball sponsored by the volunteer fire company; the other, on June 25, was a program of tableaux vivants produced by "several ladies of Terrebonne and Lafourche" for religious purposes.³⁵ The Thibodaux Fire Company Ball was held in the old Philharmonic Hall, the theater of the Thibodaux Philharmonic Society and Société Dramatique de Bienfaisance immediately before the Civil War. Tickets were one dollar each. Though the firemen projected the ball to raise funds to buy hose for the fire engine, this first social event in Thibodaux after the close of the war served significantly to emphasize the need for reviving the free social intercourse that had been neglected during the war. The Sentinel editor, in commenting on the success of the event in the February 17 issue wrote:

. . .Sociability should be fostered and encouraged, and there is no better way of doing this than by giving the "young folks" of both sexes frequent opportunities of meeting each other. We are sorry to say that Lafourche is far behind hand of other sister parishes in the gallantry of the young men in the sociability of all classes. This

³⁵ Thibodaux Sentinel, June 9, 1866.

should not be; life is short and full of cares, anxieties and solicitude. We should therefore look to enjoyment and pleasure; offer and improve opportunities where the troubles and concerns of everyday life may be drowned in the sweets and pleasures of sociability.

Soon after the Fireman's Ball Philharmonic Hall, the second story of a business house, was converted into a series of offices.³⁶ The tableaux vivants program on June 25 was staged in the Lafourche Parish Court House in Thibodaux. The program consisted of vocal and instrumental music and a series of tableaux. Though the entertainment was announced as a benefit of religious needs, it was essentially a social event. Individuals in charge of planning and production showed experience and ability in selecting ideas and events to picture, and the scenic effects gained special comment:

. . . The tableau . . . was called the Dream, and represented Beauty reposing in sweet slumber on a richly tufted divan; overhead appeared an angel, hovering upon snow white wings in mid air, like a fabled Peri. . . . The Scene from the Corsair and The Partition of Poland were also most beautiful tableaux, as regards scenic effect. . . .³⁷

During the next three years in Thibodaux concerts and tableaux vivants presentations characterized community entertainments. On March 5, 1867, amateur musicians volunteered their services in a concert of vocal and instrumental music for the benefit of The Rev. M. P. Chamberlin, disabled pastor of the Presbyterian Church. Receipts from the sale of tickets and a supper served by the ladies of the church netted the beneficiary \$551.50.³⁸ A. C. Ellis, a

³⁶ Ibid., June 16, 1866.

³⁷ Ibid., June 30, 1866.

³⁸ Ibid., March 16, 1867.

resident of Assumption parish, appeared at the Thibodaux Courthouse in a program of dramatic readings on August 9. The price of admission was fifty cents, and the program was attended by an "appreciative audience of ladies and gentlemen." Like O. K. Fate, the dramatic reader who appeared in Plaquemine in 1866, A. C. Ellis presented a program of readings which he hoped would be successful enough to justify his touring among the towns in the area.³⁹ Selections which merited specific mention in the review were The Sailor Boy's Dream, Mark Antony's Oration from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Poe's The Raven, and a piece called The Maniac, which often appeared on non-professional theater programs during the period. Ellis closed his recital with a "rehearsal of a supposed speech of Daniel Webster, delivered at Rochester, New York, which convulsed the listeners with laughter and sent the audience home in the best of humor."⁴⁰ Amateur performers frequently satirized

³⁹ Ibid., August 7, 1867.

⁴⁰ The comic effect of the dramatic reader's "rehearsal" may have been achieved simply by a caricature of Webster's oratorical style and delivery or it may have come through a parody of ideas expressed by the great orator. A combination of these devices possibly was used. The mention of a specific place for the speech would strongly indicate that the performer had a particular address in mind when he composed his imitation. Webster addressed a public meeting on the Courthouse Square in Rochester, New York, on July 20, 1837, at which time he discussed the advantages of national over state control of currency. On September 20 and 21, 1843, Webster was guest speaker at the anniversary meeting of the State Agricultural Association which was held in conjunction with the State Agricultural Fair in Rochester. In his address Webster discussed the growing problems of commerce and trade and pointedly distinguished between "agriculture as that great pursuit of society in which the great mass of men are engaged, in temperate climates, and in a soil adapted to produce a variety of things which are useful for food and for raiment of men" and "another cultivation of the fields, appropriate to tropical climates which has received the usual denomination of the plantation--the planting interest of society. . . ." -- Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster. Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1903. 18 volumes. XIII, pp. 88-100; 172-195.

activities of the Reconstruction government during the period, and the Ellis oration rehearsal may well have been an early example of that popular type of entertainment.

On July 21, 1868, a program of tableaux vivants was presented. The sponsoring group was not identified. Three months later the Democratic Colored Minstrel Club of Napoleonville announced a scheduled performance at Union Hall in Thibodaux for the benefit of the Wide Awake club of Colored Democrats of Napoleonville.⁴¹ The final production of the year was a combination concert and tableaux entertainment sponsored by St. John's Episcopal church on November 28. Managers of the program secured the use of a spacious second floor room over the Thibodaux Foundry, which the Sentinel designated as ". . . commodious enough to seat all who may desire to attend." Emanuel Chol, a prominent resident music teacher of Thibodaux, planned and directed the musical numbers, which alternated with a series of fourteen tableau scenes. A variety of subjects including comic, satiric, sentimental, and pastoral scenes were selected for tableaux. The Harvest Scene, the farmer's life at haying time; Dotheboy's Hall, adapted from Nicholas Nickleby; The Game of Life, a game of chess overlooked by an angel in clouds; The Christian's Dream; The Flower of the Family, represented by a flour barrel which suddenly fell to pieces to reveal the flower; Cupid's Court; Rebecca at the Well; and the intervening musical selections composed the first part of

⁴¹ Sentinel, October 24, 1868. This Napoleonville organization is the only Negro dramatic club with political objectives of which there is any record; however, Negro groups frequently organized theatrical clubs to provide funds for their schools, their churches, even for their own amusement and entertainment.

the entertainment. During the recess of half an hour "refreshments in the shape of apple toddy, punch, cakes, turkey, ham, chicken salad and many other nice things. . . ." were served in the ante rooms. The program resumed after the intermission with a tableau called A Turkish Scene, presenting the Turk on cushions in his tent, dreaming, with Greece bound in chains at his feet and guards standing by to exemplify the lines:

At midnight in his guarded tent
 The Turk lay dreaming of the hour,
 When Greece, her knee in suppliance bent
 Would tremble at his power.

Followed then a scene entitled Woman's Rights, in which things were arranged in "such admirable reversion of style and customs"; Blue-board's Wives; Faith, Hope and Charity; The Magic Mirror; The Gipsies' Camp, exhibiting "all the peculiarities of that gay, jovial race"; and The Queen of Sheba, showing the queen presenting gifts to Solomon, all "clothed in Oriental costumes." Among the musicians were Dansereau, Aucoin, Cazenavette, and Swartenburg--names familiarly associated with the Philharmonic Society and the Société Dramatique, organizations which were active before the Civil War. The Lyric Band played the overture. A violin quartet, pianists, and vocal soloists offered a variety of selections ranging from classical music to comic songs, a most striking example of which was described as "Paddy Malone, a broth of boy just over from Ireland, with his bundle, his shillela, and the new patches his mother had put on his coat, and his hat of the latest style, who couldn't hardly spake the English language entirely at all. . . ." The evening's

entertainment netted the church organization "something over \$200."⁴²

Community entertainments during 1869 began with a benefit concert on January 16. Professor Swartenburg, music teacher at Lafourche Male Academy in Thibodaux, directed the program for the benefit of the organ fund of the Presbyterian Church. On June 16 and 17 the "ladies of the vicinity" directed a program of tableaux vivants and a variety entertainment designated as a soiree. The events were held at the public school building and were probably planned as a public school benefit. The listing of subjects of the tableaux indicated that the performers were probably the pupils of the school; however, the large audience was by no means restricted to the children of the community. The Thibodaux Lyric Band furnished music for the entertainment. The same evening I. D. Moore, attorney and teacher who was a leader in non-professional theater in Thibodaux for two decades, made his stage debut before a Thibodaux audience, reading The Raven and Shamus O'Brien.

In June, 1869, four years after the close of the Civil War, schools in Thibodaux conducted their first public commencement exercises. The Female Institute of Thibodaux, established and directed by S. Tomy, presented a series of tableaux at a special

⁴² Ibid., December 5, 1868.

⁴³ Ibid., June 26, 1869. I. D. Moore was a member of the faculty of Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge in 1883, according to an announcement appearing in the French Section of the Thibodaux Sentinel, October 6, 1883; moreover, he served on the Board of Supervisors of the university during the 1886-1887 session. Catalogue of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1886-1887, Louisiana Room, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

exercise on June 30. The Lafourche Male Academy presented its students in a public exhibition on July 24. The program consisted of dialogues, dramatized orations, and John Maddison Morton's farce Box and Cox, the first play produced in Thibodaux after the war. Students B. Coulson and T. Holden and Master Harris were the actors. All for Good Order, a dialogue presenting the trials of a schoolmaster whose students speak their various languages--English, Dutch, French, and Irish--began the program. Another of the exhibition numbers was a series of orations in a setting representing the Roman Senate, with the speakers dressed in period costumes. The beginning speech was that of Cicero charging Cataline with conspiracy and treason. Cataline replied, and the exhibition closed with the decree of banishment by a third speaker. Professor Swartenburg and a group of "amateurs" furnished overture and interlude music, making the academy exhibition probably one of the more theatrical entertainments given in Thibodaux since the close of the war.⁴⁴ The academy gave a second performance on December 22, at which time E. L. Tenny, principal of the school, directed a farce entitled My Husband's Mirror. At the third annual commencement on July 20, 1871, the Lafourche Male Academy presented a program of three one-act plays. The Drunkard's Warning opened the program and was followed by a burlesque entitled Six Months and Six Years after Marriage. The Persecuted Dutchman closed the program.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Thibodaux Sentinel, July 31, 1869.

⁴⁵ Ibid., July 29, 1871.

In September, 1871, members of Protector Fire Company No. 2 of Thibodaux sponsored the first amateur productions of regular plays given by the community at large since the Civil War. The two-evening entertainment began a series of non-professional activities which two years later grew into the town's first organized theater group of the period. Designed to raise funds for the benevolent use of the volunteer company, the program consisted of two plays each evening of September 12 and 13. The Little Treasure and The Model Tradesmen were performed the first evening. Toodles was given the second evening and the Model Tradesmen was repeated. In April, 1872, Thibodaux Fire Company No. 1 sponsored a four-day Fête Champêtre, the out-door festival type of entertainment which attracted guests from many of the surrounding parishes. Elaborate planning, organization, and rehearsing required to conduct such an entertainment are indicated by the following advertisement from the March 20, 1872, issue of the Thibodaux Sentinel:

FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

Thibodaux Fire Co. No. 1.

Thursday, April 11, Inauguration Ceremonies. At 8 o'clock P. M. Addresses by members of the Company.
 Friday, April 13th [sic]. Horse Race, at 2 o'clock P. M., to be followed by a variety of amusements.
 Saturday, April 14th [sic]. Company in Full Uniform, with Engine will attend Mass at St. Joseph's Church.
 Trial of Engine at 4 o'clock P. M.

Pole Climbing, Jumping Matches, Cock Fights, Races of Various Kinds, Wheels of Fortune, and many other amusements during the evening and night.

Concert, Tableaux, Theatricals, &c., on the evening of the 12th, 13th, and 14th, beginning at 8 o'clock, P. M.

Concert, Music by Prof. J. Swartenbrock [sic] splendid "String Band."

Display of Fire Works each night after the Concert.

A well conducted RESTAURANT, supplied with every thing the New Orleans Market affords, open at all hours. Refreshments of various kinds to be had from 9 A. M. to 12 o'clock P. M. Two Fine Brass Bands will play on the ground.

Ticket to Concert, 50 cents; Children under twelve years of age Half Price.

Admission to the ground, Free. A strong police will be on the ground to maintain order and decorum. A detailed programme of entertainments, distributed each day.

The managers constructed a genuine carnival setting for the fête in a large brick yard owned by a Mrs. Knobloch. The brick shed was converted by the aid of whitewash and surrounding "promenades" into a restaurant. A grand pavilion seventy-five by forty-five feet was constructed and topped by tarpaulins. In one end of the pavilion was the stage, fourteen by ten feet on which all theatrical performances took place. Seats were provided for seven hundred people, and the whole area was lighted by paroline lamps provided by Larkin & Grisamore, general merchants. A band stand was constructed in the center of the yard for the bands "which played at intervals during the day and night," and a flag pole eighty feet high held the United States flag and pennants of the "Fête Champêtre" and "Thibodaux Fire Company No. 1."

Like the program given by Protector Company No. 2 a few months earlier, Company No. 1 chose farces for presentation. On April 12 the plays were Cherry Bounce and The Persecuted Dutchman. Scheixnaydre After a Fishing Frolic was performed on April 13, and the closing evening's program was made up of Minstrel Variety. Dramatic readings and recitations were especially prominent in both the fire companies'

programs. E. L. Tenny, the teacher in Thibodaux College; I. D. Moore; C. M. Moore, a general merchant; and T. A. Badaux, an attorney, were popular readers. J. Swartenburg's String Band and a French quartet composed of Prof. Emil Chel, J. Troné, C. Legarde and E. A. O'Sullivan furnished general and specialty music. Twenty-eight members of the two fire companies appeared in the various casts of the plays. C. M. Moore, Thomas Badaux, R. E. McBride, A. B. Ragan and W. C. Ragan of Protector Company No. 2, and S. T. Grissmore, H. T. Higginbotham, and W. A. Fulford of Thibodaux Fire Company No. 1, were the leaders of the theatrical activities of their respective groups. Protector Company used women to play the feminine roles in their plays; however, men took the feminine roles in the fete champetre program.

The entertainment by Protector Company No. 2 in September was held in Tenny Hall, the large school room used by the Tenny Brothers for their private school. The reviewer, writing for the September 17, 1871, issue of the Sentinel, commented: ". . . that the amateur performers who, for the first time appeared in their different characters, should have so ably delineated them, with so much ease and grace, was a subject of wonder to the audience. . . ." The April programs held on the outdoor stage before larger audiences, however, demanded greater projection, and the farces were less effective. Individual dramatic readers, therefore, gained a greater response from the audiences. C. M. Moore did an impersonation which he called The Happy Old Man. Both the make-up and the characterization gained special comment; moreover, the number was repeated by request on the

second evening's program. I. D. Moore had gained a reputation with a repertoire of Poe's poems, and The Raven was repeated. T. A. Badesaux, the young Thibodaux attorney, made his debut as a reader on the evening of April 12. The Fireman was his initial selection. On the following evening he read The Pilot and on April 14 he gave an original political satire called Eloquence, in which was enacted a "... scene in Tennessee in 1866 in which a colored political meeting was broken up by a Ku Klux 10 feet high and with an illuminated head, who drank two large pitchers of water to the astonishment of the terrified orators. . . ."46 Three thousand visitors attended the events of the three-day festival where "everything was gay and pleasant," and the sponsoring fire company reported a net profit of \$1250.00, with which to establish a relief fund.47

There was little activity during the remainder of 1872. E. A. O'Sullivan, the school teacher, directed musical programs on June 18 and 19 in which singers from New Orleans took part. Produced for the joint benefits of Thibodaux College and Mont-Carmel Convent, the programs featured Theresa Cannon, Julia Flentry, and A. Wagner, singers from New Orleans, and certain other numbers which were "admirably acted." The Presbyterian Church conducted a series of charades, tableaux, and variety amusements at the home of E. F. Holden on July 1. The Crisp Family played a three-day engagement at Thibodaux, evidently a second visit for the noted theatrical troupe, the announcement stating that "after a successful week at

46 Ibid., April 20, 1872.

47 Ibid., May 18, 1872.

Houma this family returned to Thibodaux and performed on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday--Richelieu, Lucretia Borgia, and Taming of the Shrew. . . ." being the plays. After touring the larger towns along the Teche and Red River circuits, Crisp returned to Thibodaux's Town Hall the last week in December.⁴⁸

During 1873 E. A. O'Sullivan became the recognized leader in Thibodaux community theater activities. In July the Thibodaux College held a three-day commencement program of dramatic presentations. The following month Negro citizens sponsored a three-day festival at Town Hall for the benefit of the Negro church. In October O'Sullivan directed another series of plays under the sponsorship of Protector Fire Company No. 2.

The school productions included The Merchant of Venice, given on the evening of July 26 and 28, and Le Mensonge, a five-act historical play by Mile E. Sonvestre, on July 27. All performances were given on an outdoor stage, which was constructed in the grove near St. Joseph's Church. Three students--Philippe LeBlanc as Shylock, Frank Allain as Antonio, and Albert Legarde, aged 14, as Portia--were commended for creditable performances. These and others named in the casts of the school plays--Amede Celestin, J. Legarde, Pierre Larioux, Raoul Delas, and Felix Gaudin--were active in community theatricals during a later period.

The Negro Methodist congregation of Green Street, under the leadership of Frank James, the pastor, sponsored benefit entertainments on August 7, 8, and 9. The first two evenings the programs consisted

⁴⁸ Ibid., December 26, 1872.

of music and declamation. Charades and short dialogues were given the closing evening of the series. The sponsors secured the use of the Town Hall theater, served suppers each evening, and "everything passed off very pleasantly and afforded . . . a handsome aid to the treasury of the Congregation."⁴⁹ On September 7 a program of charades was "gotten up by amateurs" for the benefit of three orphan children of the community. The program was performed creditably but the audience was small, because of weather conditions. The fact that the editor of the Sentinel "noticed among the actors on the stage our 'Devil' was having a h--igh time in Wigs and Moustaches," suggests that growing interest in dramatic production was spreading among the townspeople and that they need only look about them for cause to sponser a benefit production.⁵⁰

For their Grand Entertainment on October 3, 4, 5, and 6 Protector Fire Company No. 2 secured the use of the upper floor of the warehouse of Rodley Brothers, dealers in wagons and carts, on Levee Street. Managers of the projected entertainment equipped the hall with a stage, seating accommodations for five hundred persons, and concession booths. E. A. O'Sullivan was director of the plays, and J. A. Irons and A. Chol constructed and painted the stage scenery. Larkin and Grisamore furnished paroline oil lamps to light the stage and auditorium. Activities began at five o'clock on the afternoon of October 3 with a parade. Participating were the Young Men's Benevolent Association, La Société de Bienfaisance et d'Assistance

⁴⁹ Ibid., August 16, 1873.

⁵⁰ Ibid., September 13, 1873.

Mutuelle, the two volunteer fire companies, and the Thibodaux Lirique Band. The line of march extended through the principal sections of the town, thence to Levee Street and the new Bodley Hall. At 8 o'clock Clay Knobloch, a leading Thibodaux attorney and orator for the occasion, delivered an address. An interlude of music followed, and the program ended with a recitation by Silas T. Grisamore,⁵¹ entitled Roman Sentinel at the Destruction of Pompeii. The Iron Mask, Chapitre D'Incidents, and Cool as a Cucumber were the plays. The Iron Mask was the feature play on the evenings of October 4 and 6. Cool as a Cucumber was the after-piece on the latter evening. The French farce Chapitre D'Incidents was given on October 5. On October 21 a program of orations, dramatic readings and a farce was presented under the direction of T. A. Badaux, A. B. Ragan, and S. T. Grisamore for the benefit of yellow fever victims of Shreveport and Memphis. New readers appeared on this program: Lewis

⁵¹ Silas T. Grisamore for many years was a leading citizen of Thibodaux. He was elected Mayor in 1860; he served in the Confederate army during the Civil War, and for a time was stationed with his unit at Minden, Louisiana, where in January, 1865, he participated with members of his unit in an amateur production of The Lady of Lyons. (See "Reminiscences, by Uncle Silas," Thibodaux Sentinel, January 14, 1871). He was appointed the first mayor of Thibodaux by the Reconstruction government after the close of the war. For a time he served as editor of the Sentinel during which time he was a regular correspondent to the New Orleans papers. He wrote prolifically of the history of Thibodaux and the Bayou Lafource Country. An original organizer of the volunteer fire companies in Thibodaux, S. A. Grisamore maintained an active interest in civic affairs; he served at various periods on the parish school board and was police juror for a number of years. He was an experienced amateur actor, often directed community theatrical productions, and served as president of the Young Men's Dramatic Club in 1877. In private business he was for a time a partner in the company of Grisamore and Larkin, general merchants, and was Agent for the North American Life Insurance Company. (See Thibodaux Sentinel, 1865-1897, *passim*).

Quinn read Dow's Flat, by Bret Harte; Clay Knobloch, Hagar in the Wilderness; J. S. Billiu, An Elegy; J. S. Goode, Vulture; I. D. Moore and S. T. Grisamore, familiar names from previous programs, read Pat and the Gridiron and Song of the Shirt, respectively. The Thibodaux Brass Band furnished music and Bodley Hall was made available without rental charge. Concession booths at the hall sold a "variety of refreshments donated principally by the people of this town and the adjacent neighborhood. . . ." The benefit performance netted \$438.60.⁵²

In January, 1874, young actors in Thibodaux organized a theatrical organization called The Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche. The new club presented on February 13 at Bodley Hall a benefit performance for Protector Fire Company No. 2, the beginning of an energetic activity which extended to June, 1876. During that period the Dramatic Club of Lafourche gave twenty-one performances, producing about thirty-five plays. Of this number there were twenty-six English plays, principally one and two-act farces, and nine French titles, including farces and an occasional opera bouffe. The advertisement of the first production of the club lists a typical evening's program:

GRAND INITIAL ENTERTAINMENT
of the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche.
Friday Evening, February 13, 1874. Order of
Exercises: To Paris and Back for Five Pounds,
a farce in 1 Act. Irresistibly Impudent, Comedy
in 2 Acts. 16,000 Years Ago, An African Burlesque.
The Widows Victim, An Ethiopian Interlude.
Admission, 50 cents. . . .⁵³

⁵² Ibid., November 1, 1873.

⁵³ Ibid., January 31, February 7, 1874.

This program was repeated on February 14, with the addition of "several recitations and songs," and on April 15 and 18 similar benefit performances were given honoring Thibodaux Fire Company No. 1. New plays on the first evening's program were Test of Truth, two-act comedy; D'ye Know Me Now, a farce in two scenes; and The Ticket Taker, "an Ethiopian Farce." Bodley Brothers gave the use of Bodley Hall for the benefit performances and the "large audience present was an evidence of the good wishes of the community for the success of these new candidates for public favor. . . ."⁵⁴

During May and June the Dramatic Club leased the building recently occupied by general merchants Larkin and Crisamore, corner of Levee and St. Louis Streets, and fitted it into "a beautiful and elegant little theatre, with every convenience for the accommodation of at least three or four hundred person." The new theater was called Waverley Hall, and its extensive alterations and furnishings gained for the club favorable comment from the public--and new financial obligations.

Objectives of the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche were set forth editorially by the Thibodaux Sentinel editor, who was also a member of the club, in the issue of July 11, 1874, a few days before the first productions were scheduled in Waverley Hall:

⁵⁴ Ibid., February 21, April 18, 1874.

We may take it for granted, we think, that there is not in this town a lover of the Thespian art whose feelings does not echo ours, when we say that we are highly pleased to learn that the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche is now completely and permanently organized and that with the assistance of the Harmony Club, they will give on the evenings of Monday and Tuesday next, a series of dramatic representations of so entertaining a character as to justify the prediction that the audience will be in raptures. . . .

The objects of this association are such as to make it plain to any unprejudiced mind that the club is eminently deserving to encouragement and support of all who wish well to any association that seeks and aims to excite among its members a taste for intellectual pursuits. It has other ends in view than the mere amusement of the passing hour. Being a literary as well as a dramatic association, it is intended to provide its members with the means of mental improvement. . . .

By acting plays, one necessarily familiarizes himself with expressions more elegantly framed and choicely worded than such as are commonly used in ordinary conversation. Acting plays is also an effective means of strengthening the memory, of acquiring distinctness and precision in articulation, a pleasing delivery and graceful action. . . .

The editorial, anticipating objections to a theatrical organization in the community, continued:

We are well aware that the most significant objection to theatrical performances seems to consist in the assertion that they are injurious to morals. Now such an objection could not be seriously urged against the performances of this association, if indeed, any one can be found here, to judge them so uncharitably. It would be a total misapprehension of one of the objects of the association to harbor the thought that they would present to the public a performance the least objectionable on the score of morality. The power of the theatre exerted in the manner proposed by the association is not only harmless but productive of good. . . .

The organizational card of the Young Men's Dramatic Club first appeared in the Sentinel on May 30, 1874.

YOUNG MEN'S DRAMATIC CLUB--

Regular meeting Second Thursday of each month.

Officers:--Thomas A. Badeaux, President; R. R. McBride, Vice President; J. Omer Landry, Treasurer and Secretary; F. Sancen, Stage Manager; H. Pierson, Property Man; F.

Loiseau, Costumer; A. F. Knobloch, Prompter; A. E. Ragan, Floor Manager; A. Angeron, Door Keeper.
Committee of Arrangements: A. E. Ragan, Chairman, J. E. Wright, L. Aussin, M. T. Higginbotham.
Committee of Literature and Fine Arts: Thomas A. Badaux, A. F. Knobloch, F. Sangan.

With infrequent changes the card continued in the weekly until April, 1877. In September, 1874, new offices were added and the following members of the club were elected. Philippe Leblanc, secretary; J. A. Perrin, assistant stage manager, John Hay replaced Emile Loiseau as Property Man; J. C. Navarre, assistant prompter; and Thomas Holden replaced A. Angeron as Door Keeper. At this time the club discontinued its Committee of Literature and Fine Arts. No other changes were made in the club officers until January, 1876, when Emile Loiseau became vice president, Henry Riviere, secretary, T. Bergeron, costumer, and J. L. Webre, assistant prompter. In July, 1876, Silas T. Grisamore became club president, from which time the roster of officers remained unchanged through April, 1877.

Among the members of the Young Men's Dramatic Club were many of the leading business and professional men of Thibodaux. F. Sangan, the stage manager, was publisher and business manager of the Thibodaux Sentinel; A. J. Perrin, the assistant stage manager, was a general merchant and was active in municipal affairs, serving during this period on the council. R. R. McBride and C. M. Moore were general merchants, and Emile Loiseau was a tailor. A. F. Knobloch, prompter and member of the Committee of Literature and Fine Arts, was Parish Judge; L. A. Webre was serving as sheriff of Lafourche during the time he was active in the dramatic club.

Names of twenty-seven people appeared in casts of the Young Men's Dramatic Club productions during 1874 and 1875. No women became members, though on two occasions women appeared in feminine roles in club productions. Of great service to the financial support and social prestige of the club were the young women who managed the concession booths at the theater on evenings of the club performances.

Emanuel Chol organized and led a music group, variously called the Harmony Club, the Harmony Band, and Cercle de Harmonie, which was allied with the dramatic club organization and which contributed consistently to the theater activities after the club moved to Waverley Hall. Frequently, benefit performances were given for the band.

Little direct comment was made concerning stage scenery and costuming in reviews of the Young Men's Dramatic Club productions. The club bought scenery and costumes at the time it altered the building,⁵⁵ and by 1875 the club had accumulated several boxes and chests of costumes and wigs.⁵⁶

Of the acting of the members of the dramatic club, reviews consistently praised and seldom criticized. The plays chosen most

⁵⁵ Ibid., September 5, 1874.

⁵⁶ Ibid., May 22, June 5, 1875. McLaughlin and Reed minstrel troupe from New Orleans played on May 11 and 12 at Waverley Hall, and according to correspondence published in the Sentinel, the visiting troupe broke locks on the dramatic club's wardrobe chests and carried away valuable costumes and wigs. The damage was general to the complete wardrobe.

frequently were light comedy, farces, and "Ethiopian Interludes." The group seldom attempted plays which demanded serious characterizations. Under the consistent direction of P. Samcan and J. A. Perrin over a period of more than two years during which time an average of one production per month was produced, actors of the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Thibodaux became adequately proficient to merit in degree the favorable comments they received in reviews of their performances.

Prior to 1874 non-professional theater in Thibodaux had been generally a community activity. Under the leadership of the Young Men's Dramatic Club it continued to be a community activity. The French speaking element of the community was sufficiently numerous to cause the club to establish the practice in September, 1874, of presenting a French play on almost every program. Le Jeune Homme Pressé, Le Menage du Savetier, Un Vilain Monsieur, Un Mariage au Bayou were farces played repeatedly on the dramatic club programs. The short musical play Les Deux Aveugles found as appreciative an audience in Thibodaux as it did in Donaldsonville during this period. Edile Loiseau, Henry Riviere, Cyprien Azema, Theophile Bergeron, and Frank Allain were members of the club who appeared most frequently in the French plays.

A detailed chronology of the activities of the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche during the fall season of 1874 reveals the types of plays which were generally chosen for production, the individual performers who consistently did satisfactory work, and the general patronage given the club by the community. There were

eight performances between July 13, the first in Waverley Hall, and December 26. On July 13 the program opened with Poisoned, one-act farce; Le Jeune Homme Presse, one-act French comedy, followed; and the program closed with Virginia Mummy, a two-act "Ethiopian" burlesque. In the casts were Thomas A. Badeaux, J. N. Wright, J. Omer Landry, Henry Riviere, Philippe Leblanc, Frank Allain, Theophile Bergeron, John Hay, J. L. Aucoin, and Emile Loiseau. Riviere played the single female role in the opening farce, and Loiseau, Bergeron, and Aucoin appeared in the French play. Allain, who had earlier experience in Thibodaux College plays, Omer Landry, and Riviere were commended for their work in the review. On the following evening, July 14, the club repeated Virginia Mummy and Le Jeune Homme Presse, and added Jack of All Trades, one-act comedy, and The Trouble Begins at Nine, another "Ethiopian Interlude." R. R. McBride, F. Lagarde, and J. C. Navarre were new actors the second evening. The generally favorable review indicated the club was "satisfied. . . with the encouragement given them."⁵⁷

The Cross of St. John, a 3-act drama, was given three performances during September, evidencing a favorable audience toward more serious plays. At the first performance on September 4, the play was "well acted," and on the following evening the performance was "if possible, better than the previous evening." Thomas Holden, another member of the club who had graduated from school play performances, and Frank Allain were granted "extra praise" for character "delineations it would be difficult to improve." In these productions technical stage effects merited comment: "The lightning, thunder and rain, connected with the last act, was so well done that it was difficult

⁵⁷ Ibid., July 18, 1874.

to believe that it was not real." The afterpiece on the first evening was The Race for a Dinner; on September 5 a French farce Un Vilain Monsieur and an "Ethiopian" farce, Who Stole the Chickens followed the drama. On September 19 the club presented The Cross of St. John a third time. In addition to Holden, Silas T. Grisamore, J. L. Webre, and M. T. Higginbotham were new members to join the acting corps of the club during September.⁵⁸

The club gave a performance on October 17 for the benefit of the Cercle de Harmonie. Much of the program was music, including the "opera bouffe," Les Deux Aveugles with Emile Loiseau, Cyprien Azema, and an unidentified club member singing the roles. Le Menage Du Savetier, a comedy, and The Race for a Dinner completed the program. The French population of Thibodaux made up a great part of the capacity audience at the band benefit, and Emile Loiseau among the actors was commended for his work.⁵⁹

The club gave two performances during December. On December 12 the program consisted of three one-act plays and a "Stump Speech," original, and humorously critical of parish politics during the Reconstruction Period. The plays were Make Your Wills, a comedy, Les Deux Font la Paire, a farce, and Burlesque of Othello, an "Ethiopian interlude." Reviewing this program, the editor of the Sentinel frankly observed that "the actors generally performed the parts assigned them with judgement and discrimination, experience in acting beginning to become manifest to every observer. . . ." But

⁵⁸ Ibid., September 12, 1874.

⁵⁹ Ibid., October 24, 1874.

equally frank was the following observation in the same review:

We would suggest to the Club that actors in costume appearing in the audience is entirely out of taste, and not at all calculated to enhance the interest of the performances. . . . Persons visiting a theatrical entertainment look to the stage for their enjoyment and expect it at no other place.⁶⁰

The final performance at Waverley Hall during 1874 was another program of three one-act plays on December 26. Two of the plays, Make Your Wills and Le Menage du Savetier, had been presented on earlier programs. Norton's Box and Cox was here presented for the first time by the Young Men's Dramatic Club.

Activities continued through 1875, following much the same pattern as that of 1874. Plays were chosen for their amusement value. Farces and Interludes depicting the Southern Negro appeared regularly on the club programs. J. Omer Landry became the leading comedian and Emil Loiseau gained a popularity among the French population with his acting and his comic songs.

During 1875, however, the Young Men's Dramatic Club participated frequently in community benefit programs. By taking from the club its regular receipts and by giving the theater audiences a regular theater fare, these performances drained the financial resources built up previously by the club. On April 3 and 4 the Fire Department sponsored a fête champêtre and members of the dramatic club, who were also members of the volunteer fire department, were asked to provide theatrical entertainments each evening. On April 17, 18, and 19, St. Joseph's Church conducted a fair to raise

⁶⁰ Ibid., December 19, 1874.

needed funds. In the costs of the theatrical performances each evening of the fair were names of members of the dramatic club. On June 24 and 25, St. John's Episcopal Church sponsored benefit programs at Waverley Hall. Again the dramatic club provided much of the personnel and equipment needed for the productions. The little time remaining for the young men to continue their regular program of plays was insufficient for them to gain the financial aid needed to make payments on Waverley Hall. For the community, 1875 afforded an increased amount of theatrical entertainment of a high level generally. For the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche, 1875 brought financial difficulties and a general decline of interest in the organization by many of its members. Though there was no financial report published by the Fire Department following the fête champêtre, reviews indicated capacity attendance at the performances. Gross receipts for the three-day fair sponsored by St. Joseph's Church amounted to \$2200.⁶¹ St. John's Church had a net profit of more than \$750 from the June 24-25 entertainments.⁶² Commenting on prices of admission to both the firemen's benefit and the church fair, the Sentinel editor wrote in the April 24 issue: "People have but little money to spend now-a-days, and the opportunity to obtain the worth of that little was given on those occasions."

That the club was aware of its difficult situation is manifest in an announcement in La Sentinelle de Thibodaux, French section of the Sentinel, on June 12:

⁶¹ Ibid., April 24, 1875.

⁶² Ibid., July 10, 1875.

CLUB DRAMATIQUE.—Le Club Dramatique de Lafourche se propose de donner le 19 de ce mois une représentation dramatique composée d'un programme qui satisfera tous ceux qui voudront bien honorer cette soirée de leur présence. Le public doit se rappeler que cette association a été fondée au prix de grands sacrifices pécuniaires et que les jeunes gens qui la composent n'ont d'autre but et d'autre désir que de travailler au bénéfice général de la commune,--en les à toujours trouvé prêts à donner leur concours à toutes oeuvres charitables. Avec un tel désintéressement nous avons tout bien d'espérer que leurs efforts seront couronnés d'un plein succès. Si contre notre attente, il en était autrement, ces jeunes gens n'ont qu'à abandonner leur entreprise et aller comme passe temps, contempler les adorateurs du Dieu Dollar."

The June 19 program was made up of two English and one French one-act plays: Bex and Cox, Blue Devils, and Le Coup de Pinceau. The Sentinel reviewed the performance briefly.

The entertainment. . . was a very pleasant and agreeable one. The acting was well done, and the music by the Cercle de l'Harmonie was worthy of that excellent band. It is a matter of regret that so small an attendance was had. . . .⁶³

Three performances by visiting troupes were given during July. The Reynolds Family gave variety programs of magic, dramatic readings, and comic songs on July 2 and 17. The latter program was a benefit performance for the Dramatic Club. On July 10, a performance entirely in French by "Artistes du Théâtre du Vaudeville de La Nouvelle Orleans" was given at Waverley Hall. The Young Men's Dramatic Club appeared in their next production on August 4, at which time they introduced two innovations in a special effort to increase attendance. They advertised "Communication Tickets" whereby they sold blocks of eight

⁶³ Ibid., June 26, 1875.

and sixteen tickets at "reduced price,"⁶⁴ and they invited women to act feminine roles in the plays. Three new plays made up the program—Toodles, A Slight Misunderstanding, and Monsieur Chapolard. Mrs. S. E. Lawless and Miss Seabourne, Miss E. Springer, and Miss H. Davidson acted feminine roles in the English plays; however, Celestin and Riviere did the feminine characterizations in the French farce. Thomas Badeaux, Thomas Holden, J. Omer Landry, C. M. Moore and others of the regular acting corps did excellent work. Emile Loiseau and Cyprien Azema appeared in an interlude of comic songs, and the Cercle de l'Harmonie performed to "greatly enhance" the entertainment. A capacity house attended the performance. The next production, on October 20, included a new farce Done on Both Sides in which Miss E. Springer and Mrs. Lawless were invited to make their second appearance with the club. Le Menage du Savatier was the French farce, it having been substituted at the last moment when a cast member of the new play Le Page became ill. In addition, the club manager invited the Cercle Joyeux, the dramatic club of Labadieville, to give a performance of an original satire by members of the club entitled La Sixieme Cour de Justice. In the Sentinel four days before the scheduled performance, appeared a second direct appeal for greater public favor:

. . . The young gentlemen composing this organization have had to struggle for upward of

⁶⁴ Ibid., July 31, 1875. The specific reason for restricting the number of tickets per block sale to multiples of eight was not explained. Single admissions were fifty cents, the established fee to all regular performances of the club.

⁶⁵ Ibid., August 7, 1875.

a year against what seemed to be an almost universal apathy on the part of our people. Had it not been for the kind words and encouraging presence of an appreciative few, the Club would have had to discontinue its organization. . . From what we know of the gentlemen in charge of the selection of plays, we can confidently state that the entertainments of the Club will always be marked by the most scrupulous regard to the feelings and opinions of the most sensitive. . . . In the matter of the double entendre, a blemish too common among professional actors, we know that it will be rigidly excluded from the performances of the Club, both on account of the high character of the ladies and gentlemen who take part in the plays, and who could at once indignantly frown down such a proceeding, and also, because there is a moral tone in this community, which would not tolerate such a thing for one moment.

We are satisfied that if those who hold aloof for fear of danger to their morals would once attend, they would be surprised that they allowed themselves to be influenced by such baseless apprehensions. In fact, they could find nothing more before them than a little family party, composed of ladies and gentlemen with whom they are thoroughly acquainted who go upon an elevated platform for the purpose of interpreting for a brief hour or two, the productions of the master-minds in the field of dramatic literature. The treat thereby afforded is at once intellectual and conducive to recreation of the purest sort. It is a well-settled principle that people must have amusement and recreation, and if innocent means are not placed at their disposal, they certainly indulge in that which is deleterious [sic] and harmful to sound morality. It was with a view of affording a harmless species of recreation and enjoyment to the citizens of Thibodeaux and vicinity that the Dramatic Club was organized, and it is for the reason that they labor so well, and so generously for the public good, that the efforts of those young gentlemen should be sustained and encouraged by the most liberal patronage. . . .⁶⁶

The visiting Cercle Joyeux performance of their original satire of Reconstruction Justice and the farce by the local club were well received. R. H. McBride and Thomas A. Badesaux again appeared as readers, and Emanuel Chol's musical organization

⁶⁶ Ibid., October 16, 1875.

contributed in making the October 20 program one of the best given by the club.⁶⁷ It was the last elaborately planned program by the organization.

On December 29 two one-act plays were given: Virginia Mummy and La Vendetta. On February 26, 1876, Le Mariage au Bayou, an original comedy, The Model Tradesman, and comic songs by Emile Loiseau were given after postponements from dates of previous announcements.

In April the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche effected a reorganization at which time the name of the club was changed to the Benevolent Dramatic Club. Objectives, briefly stated, were placed before the community in the April 15 issue of the Sentinel:

. . . The members lay no claims to any other title than that of amateurs, and as they propose to labor as much for the public good as for their own amusement it is hoped that in the future they may have good houses to encourage them in an undertaking so praiseworthy and laudable.

On June 14 the new club gave the first of a proposed series of performances. One half of the net profit of each entertainment was to be devoted "to some benevolent purpose." The price of admission was lowered from fifty to twenty-five cents, "owing to the hard times." Though the brief review indicated the performance was well attended, it further revealed that the enthusiasm which marked the earlier club activities was not present. ". . . The programme was more varied and less pretentious than usual, but was well rendered. . . ." There is no evidence that the club appeared again.

⁶⁷ Ibid., October 23, 1875.

In September a professional performer presented a program of magic. In December the Ida Lewis Company played a five-day engagement at Waverley Hall. During the first three months of 1877 traveling companies appeared in Thibodaux. Audiences were small. On March 9 and 10 a group of local young men appeared in minstrel variety programs. Little public interest attended the new enterprise.⁶⁸

St. Joseph's Church and the Thibodaux Fire Department jointly sponsored a three-day fair on the church grounds on April 21, 22, and 23, 1877. The management of the entertainment scheduled a production of L'Orpheline des Pyrénées by students of Mont Carmel Convent on April 22. Former members of the Young Men's Dramatic Club presented Taming the Tiger and Potivard on the following evening. An excursion train was run from New Orleans by Morgan's L. & T. Railroad to Lafourche Crossing, a few miles south of Thibodaux, from where packets furnished by sponsors of the fair provided free transportation to Thibodaux. Combined net profits from the theatrical performances, the program of varied sporting contests, and general concessions during the three day event was more than \$2500, forty per cent of which went to the fire department.⁶⁹ From 1877, to the end of the Reconstruction period, the two and three-day fair or festival was the principal type of entertainment in Thibodaux.

There were, however, two attempts to organize theatrical clubs during these years. In May, 1877, a few young men formed the Young Men's Social Club. Original members of the new club were James

⁶⁸ Ibid., March 17, 1877.

⁶⁹ Ibid., April 7, 28, May 5, 1877.

Springer, L. E. Michelet, Austin Pugh, Edward Riviere, C. S. Larkin, H. J. Celestin, Clayton Badeaux, A. D. Britsch, and L. B. Thompson. Except for Celestin, none of the members of the Social Club had been members of the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche. Described editorially, this group was one "whose only ambition is to afford the inhabitants of Lafourche an occasional pleasant evening's entertainment."⁷⁰ The club's initial program at Waverley Hall May 19, 1877, included My Uncle, the Captain, a comedy, and a farce entitled Quarrelsome Servants. No admission was charged, and the audience was encouraging. Two evenings later the group presented a program of four one-act plays and charged twenty-five cents admission. Again the audience was large and was generally satisfied with the performance. On July 4 the third performance of the Social Club was well attended and "the acting was an improvement on previous occasions giving evidence of care and study on the part of the performers." Poor attendance, however, at an August 27 performance was the only cause discovered for the discontinuance of public appearances by the club. In February, 1878, the Social Club attempted to reorganize following publication in the Sentinel of an encouraging letter from a Thibodaux citizen. The group chose L. E. Michelet, president; Edward Badeaux, treasurer; C. G. Badeaux, secretary, Samuel B. Blum, assistant secretary; Robert Glover, stage manager, and L. B. Thompson, assistant stage manager. The new organization proposed to perform monthly, each performance to be given for the benefit of a specific civic or benevolent organization. The group

⁷⁰ Ibid., June 30, 1877.

announced the first performance tentatively for the close of February or the first of March with the proceeds to be donated to the Public School Fund of Thibodaux.⁷¹ In the meantime "friends" of Guion Academy, a private school in Thibodaux, announced a two-day benefit program for February 27 and 28. R. R. McBride and F. Sencan, veteran actor and stage manager, respectively, of the defunct Dramatic Club of Lafourche, directed the productions in which established actors from the old club appeared. The financial report published following the program showed a net profit of \$347.40, after production costs of \$45.65 were paid for "printing, servants' hire, wine, etc. . . ."⁷² The projected program of the Social Club did not take place, and in the April 20 issue of the Sentinel appeared the following clarifying statement: "The Y. M. Social Club of this town has 'gone where the woodbine twineth'—up the spout!"

In the meantime St. John's Episcopal Church and St. Joseph's Catholic Church continued their theatrical activities. On December 20 and 21, 1877, St. John's Church sponsored benefit productions. A pantomime in two acts entitled The Mistletoe Bough, an adaptation of the story of Genevra, and a farce Quash, or Nigger Practice were given the first evening. Snowed In, a three-act play, was the second evening's bill. St. Joseph's Church, under the direction of its pastor, C. M. Menard, gave a three-day fair on May 11, 12, and 13, 1878. The plays of the first performances were Sans Gene and Taming

⁷¹ Ibid., February 9, 1878.

⁷² Ibid., March 9, 1878.

the Tiger, both farces. On May 12 Moliere's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme was produced. Again, an excursion train brought visitors from New Orleans, and a Lafourche steamer brought an additional two hundred visitors from surrounding towns. The review of the play, however, was not favorable. Playing from an improvised stage in the courtyard, the actors

. . . could not be heard much beyond the few front rows of seats. The crowd of spectators was so vast and extended over so much surface, that the voices of the actors became absorbed. . . . This difficulty of being inaudible must not be attributed to the actors who interpreted intelligently the masterpiece of Moliere's comedies.⁷³

Between August and December, 1878, the widespread yellow fever epidemic was serious in Thibodaux. All social activities were discontinued. In April, 1879, however, St. Joseph's Church organized a dramatic club with Thomas A. Badeaux as vice president and general director of productions. The first program on April 13 was a three-act play entitled Vidas, and a French farce, Prince d'un Jour. I. D. Moore directed a two-evening program of tableaux and one-act plays for the benefit of the Thibodaux Presbyterian Church on April 16 and 17. Three weeks later, on May 3, 4, and 5, St. Joseph's Dramatic Club presented one-act plays on its outdoor stage in connection with the church fair. And on June 5, 6, and 7 the Episcopal Church sponsored a fair and dramatic program at Waverley Hall. On the evening of June 5 Dot, The Cricket on the Hearth was the play. Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper, with

⁷³ Ibid., May 18, 1877.

a cast of more than thirty children, was produced on June 6.

Of the cast of eleven in the first evening's play, only J. Omer Landry and Samuel Blum had been members of either of the earlier dramatic clubs. It should be noted further that the plays selected for recent production were in many instances longer and more serious types. Reviews indicated that audiences were pleased with the change, and special notice was given the children's performance of Cinderella.

St. Joseph's Dramatic Club gave two other performances during the fall season. On September 28 was a scheduled three-act play, evidently historical in subject since costumes were rented from New Orleans. On October 18 the club produced Don Vasco de Gomez, another full evening play, for the benefit of sufferers in the Bayou Boeuf (Rapides Parish) area.

Theatrical activities sponsored by religious organizations were naturally exclusive in no small degree. The St. Joseph's Dramatic Club, although it was an organized theatrical group, was restrictive in its membership. A recognition of these factors probably prompted the editorial comments during the last half of 1879 advocating community-wide organizations. With the demand for an active theatrical organization came a general plea for a community auditorium of sufficient size not only to accommodate local activities but to provide a place for visiting theatrical and musical organizations to perform.

In August the first step was taken to provide a community activity with the organization of the Thibodaux Literary and Debating Club. The new group held regular meetings semi-monthly, proposing

to debate a different subject of community interest at each meeting.⁷⁴ In September the club secured the use of Union Hall, the courtroom of the justice of the peace, where public audiences were invited to attend the debates. The activities of the Literary and Debate Club flourished for a few months. Debate did not attract a wide community interest. In October, therefore, a different group of young Thibodaux citizens organized the Social Dramatic Club, their stated purpose being ". . . that of studying the Drama and giving occasional representations."⁷⁵ No further details of the organization—its membership, frequency of meetings, or the nature of its drama study—were recorded. It may have been the initiative of members of the Social Dramatic Club which led to the formation of an active community theater group early in the post-Reconstruction period.

Non-professional theater activity in Thibodaux throughout the Reconstruction period was predominantly a community activity. The early years were marked by elaborately planned tableaux vivants programs sponsored usually by church groups. The volunteer fire departments staged fête champêtre carnivals, including evening dramatic performances, annually during the middle period.

The Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche, under the leadership of F. Sancan, Thomas A. Badaux, and Silas T. Grissmore, and supported by an acting corps of more than a score of young business and professional men of Thibodaux, furnished the community a program of non-

⁷⁴ Ibid., September 6, 1879.

⁷⁵ Ibid., October 11, 1879.

professional theater during 1874, 1875, and 1876. Productions of the dramatic club consisted chiefly of one-act plays, light in subject and demanding broad comic effects in presentation. The bilingual population of Thibodaux caused the club to adopt a practice of including at least one French play on each program. Originality in considerable degree was evidenced in dramatic readings and comic song and dance routines which were used frequently as interludes between plays. Numerous farces treating Negro characters in various situations, especially in his unfortunate environment resulting from the effects of the Civil War were presented. Organized theatre activity deteriorated during the last years of the period, the chief causes of which were the unhealthy economic conditions of the period and an unfortunate, though non-malicious, competition among the civic and religious organizations of Thibodaux in attempting to support themselves through the production of benefit dramatic programs.

BAYOU TECHE

Abbeville

Community theater activities in the towns in the area known as the Teche Country during the Reconstruction period were probably richer than the available record can indicate. The few scattered issues of weekly newspapers from Franklin, New Iberia, Lafayette, and St. Martinville afford little more than a suggestion of the extent of non-professional theater activity. Opelousas papers have been preserved since August, 1876. The closing years of the period, therefore, are adequately covered.

Abbeville, located about twenty miles west of New Iberia on Vermilion River, sponsored an active literary society and dramatic club before 1876. Alonzo Vanslyke was president and Isaac Wise was secretary. During 1876 the club held regular meetings on Wednesday evenings.⁷⁶ In April, 1877, the local weekly announced the forthcoming production of "one of their usual unrivaled dramatic performances." The plays, The Loan of a Lover and Time Tries All, made up the program. During 1877 the literary society continued its speaking activities; however, no further dramatic performances were recorded. Leading the group were A. D. Martin, B. F. Lyons, R. P. O'Bryan, Joseph Abadie, W. A. White, Clarence J. Edwards, F. M. Levy, G. Godchaux, and Lyman C. Lyons.

During the last week in May the Helen D'Este company played two evenings in Abbeville; the same company returned on July 4 and gave performances each evening through July 9. Late in 1878 the Abbeville Meridional proposed that the Abbeville Literary Society give a performance for the benefit of victims of the yellow fever epidemic in other sections of the state; however, the next theatrical performances reviewed in the weekly were those of January 6, 7, and 8, 1879. The productions were a part of the three-day fair sponsored by the Catholic Church. The Courtroom was converted into a theater which was crowded at each of the evening performances. The program of January 6 began with a performance of the French comedy La Sortilège Natural. Comic songs by Clarence J. Edwards, a duet by W. B. White

⁷⁶ Abbeville Vermilion Banner, August 12, 1876.

and Odille Broussard, and instrumental music provided an interlude. Qui Cas les Verres les Pays, a comedy, closed the program. A French comedy entitled La Croix D'Or was performed on January 7, and Raising the Wind, a farce, was the play given on January 8. Twenty-two young men and women appeared in the three-evening programs. Four of them acted in both the French and English plays.⁷⁷

A few days later, on January 18, the Abbeville Dramatic Association was organized:

. . . Quite a number of our old and substantial citizens seem to take a live interest in the matter and Abbeville now will have a little more amusement than has been customary. . . .The committee appointed to draft a constitution and bylaws, made their report through their chairman Clarence J. Edwards. . . . The name chosen for the new society is the Abbeville Dramatic Association. . . .The society is composed of an English and a French corps and will give their initial performance on the night of February 7th.⁷⁸

Clarence J. Edwards was elected president of the new organization. G. Godchaux, W. B. White, J. T. Labit, and Jos. J. Abadie were other officers. The February 7 performance was postponed until February 15 at which time the club intended presenting "an English and French Comedy and sparkling negro minstrelsy."⁷⁹ No further information was found to indicate whether or not the production was staged. The absence of editorial comment in the weekly newspaper concerning the Dramatic Association during the year leads to the belief that the club, at least temporarily, failed in its initial efforts. Moreover,

⁷⁷ Abbeville Meridional, January 18, 1879.

⁷⁸ Ibid., January 25, 1879.

⁷⁹ Ibid., February 8, 1879.

Clarence J. Edwards, also secretary of the Abbeville Literary Society, inserted in the April 12 issue of the Meridional an urgent request of all members of the society to meet on April 16.

. . .The impending crisis which threatens the destruction of our beloved institution, renders it a paramount necessity to assume an aggressive attitude, and it is to be hoped that no member will prove so recreant as to desert her in the hour of peril.
C. J. Edwards, Secretary.

The call resulted in "a rousing old-fashioned meeting" and a complete reorganization of the society. Possibly the reorganization of the Literary Society is a sufficient cause for there not being an Abbeville Dramatic Association during 1879.

On August 2, 3, and 4, the Catholic Church sponsored a benefit fair which followed the general plan of the January program. The French plays were L'Étourdie, Revers de la Médaille, and L'École du Village, written by a Mr. Labauve of Abbeville. Outrage and Comedy of Errors were the English plays. The performers were those young people who acted in the earlier productions and who had moved to organize a dramatic club. The commentary on the acting was general; leaders were not identified. However, the audience at each performance was large and enthusiastic. Even so, it was probably a difficulty arising from the fact that Abbeville had a bilingual population which made possible the success of a somewhat selective Literary Society group and prevented a similar success to the proposed community-wide Dramatic Association.

Franklin

In Franklin, as in other towns included in this study, the early years of the Reconstruction period were spent in rebuilding what had deteriorated during the war. Especially was this true with regard to religious groups in the communities. Public entertainments proved an efficient method of raising needed funds. Tableaux Vivants and concerts by individual musicians and music groups were the types of amusements most frequently presented.

The Episcopal Church benefit at Evans' Hall on July 16, 1868, was announced as a grand concert accompanied by tableaux exhibitions. Thomas Reynolds directed the tableaux. Five days later, on July 21, the Catholic Church planned a fair and program of tableaux vivants to be held at the Tom Healy Hall. In September, 1869, the Episcopal Sabbath School sponsored an exhibition of Old Testament scenes in a panoramic display at Evans' Hall. A series of musical concerts was given during the winter months of 1869-1870, and on May 24 and 25, 1870, Thomas Reynolds directed a more elaborate two-evening tableaux program.

During the summer of 1870 a group of young citizens of Franklin organized a minstrel company. On July 18, the troupe performed in Lafayette for the joint benefits of the town clock fund and the Methodist Church Parsonage. Of the production the Lafayette critic reported that it met with "general satisfaction" and that "the vocal and instrumental music was excellent." Members of the organization included Thomas Reynolds, W. P. Johnson, A. N. Harrison, F. A. Johnson, W. Poteet, M. B. Cook, Gall, and W. I. Watkins.

... As an amateur Troupe they are hard to beat, particularly Messrs. Thos. Reynolds, W. P. Johnson, and W. Foteet. They do not make the stage a business, being all mechanics, but give these entertainments merely for their own pleasure and for charitable purposes.⁸⁰

At the time the minstrel troupe performed in Lafayette, the manager announced plans for a second tour of Teche Country towns which would extend as far north as Washington in St. Landry Parish during September and October.

None of the weekly newspapers published in Franklin after May, 1871, have been preserved. An Abbeville editor noted in October, 1878, that Franklin amateur actors performed for the benefit of the yellow fever sufferers.⁸¹ Ten years later a non-professional theater group in Thibodaux reported the selection for production of a play "that elicited so much favor in Franklin" where the "same play was performed by amateurs. . . ."⁸² That non-professional theater in Franklin gained comment in the weekly newspapers of neighboring towns on occasion seems sufficient reason to assume that Thomas Reynolds and his fellow mechanics and those amateur actors who followed them provided the community with theatrical entertainment during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Grand Coteau

Since the late 1830's the small town of Grand Coteau had enjoyed greater cultural advantages than the usual village of its

⁸⁰ Lafayette Advertiser, July 23, 1870.

⁸¹ Abbeville Meridional, October 5, 1878.

⁸² Thibodaux Sentinel, April 16, May 21, 1887. Boarding House, the play referred to, caused adverse comments by certain groups of Thibodaux citizens who believed the local theater group should choose plays of higher quality.

size. The musical organizations of St. Charles College, its seasonal dramatic performances, the debates, orations, and language exercises were given public displays. The term of the college usually began in October and extended to the following August. Musical organizations frequently made public appearances; twice each year the faculty presented the classes in programs of orations; dialogues in French, German, and English; and dramatic performances.

Grand Coteau had no weekly newspaper. The entire record of dramatic activities by the college and by the clubs of the village are preserved in part in occasional paid announcements and a few reviews written to the editor of the Opelousas newspapers during the period. F. Benausse, the college president, inserted the commencement program for 1867 in the following announcement from the Courier for August 10:

ST. CHARLES COLLEGE (GRAND COTEAU) ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT.
 August 20th, Tuesday 8 o'clock A. M.
 English play (The White Horse of the Peppers.)
 Speeches.
 French play (Le Revenant, ou le Trompeur Trompé.)
 Farewell verses, by a student of the Rhetoric class.
 Chorus, by the students of the solfège [sic] class.
 Distribution of Premiums.
 During the Exhibition, music by the College Brass Band.
 Parents of the pupils and friends of the Institution
 are invited to attend. F. BENAUSSE, S. J., President.

Financial difficulties caused the sponsors of the college to combine the faculties of St. Charles and Spring Hill College of Mobile, Alabama, during the 1868-1869 term. However, fire destroyed the buildings of the Spring Hill School and faculty and students were transferred to Grand Coteau in February, 1869. St. Charles College continued as a separate institution after the Mobile school was rebuilt during the summer months. The announcement of commencement in August, 1870,

stated that the "literary exercises will take place, . . . two theatrical pieces, one in French and the other in English."⁸³ For the 1872 commencement a large pavilion was built in the grove to accommodate the audience estimated at one thousand.⁸⁴ The large stage was equipped with scenery and "appointments" which did credit to the teachers in charge of the "Dramatic Corps." The Village Lawyer, a comedy, and Le Martyr de St. Hermenegilde, a French tragedy, were performed admirably; however the reviewer pointed out certain incongruities in costumes:

. . . The Village Lawyer, was a humorous satire on the foibles and follies of the learned profession. The characters were well sustained but we must especially commend the "honest lawyer," and the young gentleman who personated Sheepface, whose manipulation of his "mother tongue" was indeed wonderful. The scene of the French Tragedy was laid in the fifth century. The costumes were very well chosen and becoming; though why the youthful martyr and his friend should have worn "Greeley hats"—Quien Sabe? The language of this Tragedy is beautiful, the plot very good, and the young gentlemen deserve great credit for the impressive manner in which they delivered the noble sentiments which abound in this Drama, Le Martyr de St. Hermenegilde. . .⁸⁵

Grand Coteau citizens organized the Amateur Dramatic Association early in 1873. Under the leadership of R. J. Smith, president, and H. K. Dumber, secretary, the group advertised in the Opelousas Courier performances during the week of May 16, and June 18, for the benefit of "the poor of the town and vicinity." The Commencement performances of St. Charles College, held on August 5, included

⁸³ Opelousas Courier, August 13, 1870.

⁸⁴ Ibid., August 24, 1872.

⁸⁵ Opelousas Journal, August 24, 1872.

Der Zanker, a German dialogue, and A Tailor Become a Gentleman of Fashion, a three act English comedy. The Amateur Dramatic Association announced a third in their series of benefit performances for November 27. The program included a play in English and one in French—The Irish Tiger and Le Medecin Malgré Lui. Brief editorial comments in the Opelousas weeklies supported the advertisement by assuring readers that "the dramatic and musical amateurs of Grand Coteau have considerable cultivation and experience. . . "and that their Musical and Dramatic Association was formed "for their mutual improvement and amusement. . . ."86

Dramatic activities in Grand Coteau were publicized less frequently in the Opelousas weeklies during the closing years of the Reconstruction period. The college announcement for 1875 simply stated that a French drama and an English lecture were on the program. A year later, on July 31, the annual program included performances of Measure for Measure and an unnamed French comedy. Commenting on the performances the Journal editor stated that the players' "acting was easy, graceful and dignified. The enunciation clear and distinct. . . ." An indication that the school was not altogether prosperous was shown in the editor's closing sentences:

. . . The curriculum is excellent and thorough, and besides every care is bestowed upon the culture of the heart as well as the head. The Fathers are indefatigable in their exertions to make this a first-class institution. Since the war the attendance has been small, owing doubtless, to the poverty of our people. . . .⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., November 22, 1873; Opelousas Courier, November 22, 1873.

⁸⁷ Opelousas Journal, August 4, 1876.

Late in 1879 the community group reorganized under the name of the Grand Coteau Social Club. Their first performance on November 4 included two one act plays, Le Mariage Forcé and an English comedy entitled Ici On Parle Français. A visiting musical group from Breau Bridge furnished music for the program. A second performance was scheduled for Varieties Hall in Opelousas on December 26 and a third was announced at Social Club Hall in Grand Coteau on December 27.⁸⁸ Because certain of the actors were not present the Opelousas performance was postponed. Whether or not the December 27 program was given was not reported. Despite the lack of details in the record of activity by the community, clubs and the college groups, Grand Coteau was a center of non-professional theatre activity during the Reconstruction period.

Vermilionville (Lafayette)

The present city of Lafayette, situated about ten miles west of Bayou Teche on Vermilion River, was until 1884 known as Vermilionville. During Reconstruction the town was a small agricultural community probably less frequently visited by inland shipping companies than were the towns along Bayou Teche. The scattered issues of its weekly newspapers which have been preserved indicate that Vermilionville was a community sensitive to its cultural and religious needs. The Louisiana Cotton-Boll, a Vermilionville weekly, reported in its April 16, 1873, issue that the town was supporting eleven schools. The village amusements were provided

⁸⁸ Opelousas Courier, December 20, 27, 1879.

for the most part by exhibitions of the various schools.

On July 15, 1870, the Minstrel Troupe from Franklin performed at Vermilionville for the benefit of the town clock fund and the Methodist Church Parsonage. Two weeks later, on July 27, the Vermilionville Convent of Mont Carmel gave public performances of two commencement plays: The Gold Thimble and L'Etourdie. Early in 1873 the town gave enthusiastic support to the formation of a brass band. The director arranged to secure two new pieces of band music each week from Mr. Myers, a New Iberia composer. On July 1 W. H. Williams' Negro school presented a public exhibition. Mont Carmel Convent's annual program was presented July 29, their plays being Olympia, or The Entrance of A Young Girl in the World and Les Embarras D'une Petite Fille Cureuse, two one act plays.⁸⁹

In April, 1873, T. Hebert, a Vermilionville business man announced his intention to build a town hall for the benefit of "the brass band, balls, public entertainments, etc." The building was to be a thirty-five by sixty feet, two-story structure located on Main Street. The lower floor of the building was rented as a business house. The upper story, with a thirteen foot ceiling and equipped with stage and dressing rooms, became Vermilionville's first public hall. The building, completed in December, was introduced to the public with a "grand opening ball" on January 8, 1874.⁹⁰ Information concerning the community activities conducted in the

⁸⁹ Vermilionville Advertiser, August 2, 1873.

⁹⁰ Vermilionville Louisiana Cotton-Boll, April 23, August 13, 1873; The Advertiser, December 27, 1873.

new town hall during its first years is totally lacking.

Four years later, in January, 1878, Van Ambrugh's circus and menagerie performed in Vermilionville. On the 26th Helen D'Este's professional company gave a performance at Hebert's Hall, the first recorded performance of a traveling company in the small Vermilion River town. Les Deux Sourds, a one act comedy, and a series of tableaux of religious subjects formed a program given on October 15, 1879, for the benefit of one of the churches. A. H. Monnier, Jr., A. Dalahoussaye, G. Josse, and Marie Breaux acted in the play; Clemence and Rosa Castille and Nydia Bailey with Marie Breaux performed in the tableau. These new actors "performed their respective duties as if they were not wholly inexperienced. . . ." Little more is known of theatrical activities in Vermilionville. During the latter part of the century the town developed somewhat more rapidly than its neighbors. Its cultural progress was comparable to other Ieché Country towns; its theater and social clubs were frequently mentioned in the weekly newspapers preserved from other parishes; and it may be assumed that Lafayette developed and supported non-professional theater between 1880 and 1900.

New Iberia

The earliest accounts of theater activity in New Iberia during the Reconstruction Period were of church sponsored tableaux programs, performances of a visiting professional French troupe, and the organization of the Iberia Thespian Association in 1871. On April 12 the Episcopal Church secured the use of the "new Dupuy buildings on Main Street in which to present a program of tableaux

and music. Subjects selected for stage picturization were The Fairy Call, and The Wayside Shrine, both accompanied by vocal music; The Village School, Jacob's Ladder, The Seasons, Bluebeard, and The Old Woman That Lived in a Shoe. About two hundred persons attended the performance and the beneficiary netted over two hundred dollars.⁹¹

A group of French actors spent the summer months of 1871 in New Iberia and gave occasional performances. On July 27, the troupe gave their first performance in the "new theatre," a hall in the Duperier building on Main Street, which they had equipped for the purpose. On this occasion the troupe was "greeted with a better house than they have yet had." Nothing is known of the earlier performances. Mlle. Marie Hinry made her first New Iberia appearance on that date, a factor in part responsible for the increased public interest in the troupe. A Mlle. Villiers, an actress and vocalist; Gilbert, a character actor; and Charton and Guillier, comedians, the latter with a "Parisian reputation," made up the troupe. The company gave two subsequent performances, on August 5 and 22. The latter program was planned for the benefit of the newly organized volunteer fire company of New Iberia.⁹²

The Iberia Thespian Association was organized in September soon after the vacationing French players returned to the city, presumably to New Orleans, for the winter season. The need for

⁹¹ New Iberia Louisiana Sugar Bowl, April 13, 1871.

⁹² New Iberia Planters' Banner and Times, August 3, 1871; Louisiana Sugar Bowl, August 3, 10, September 7, 1871.

a community theatre possibly had prevented an earlier organization, since on August 3 the Planters' Banner and Times announced to the public that the young men of New Iberia were discussing formation of an association "as we now have a nice little theatre in our town." The Louisiana Sugar Bowl, on September 7, urged an early "revival of the Amateur Dramatics" as a means of furnishing amusement for the public and their own improvement:

AMUSEMENTS.—Now that the Opera Company which has made New Iberia its place of abode for the past few months is about to take its departure, we hope to see the revival of the "Amateur Dramatics," or some other local society, the members of which can afford to devote a portion of their time to the amusement of the public and to their own improvement. . . . A permanent society of amateurs, whether dramatic or musical, or both combined, would prove even more successful in general, and by occasionally assuming the cause of an educational or benevolent institution, their success would be assured. We believe that societies of this kind, composed of the young gentlemen and young ladies of the place, add materially to its business interests; and we know that its effects upon the rising generation, and upon present society even, is most salutary and beneficial. People must have amusement, and if it does not come to them at their home, many will seek it at a distance, regardless of cost. We have in New Iberia the elements of a first class society of this kind, and believe that if some live members of the old "Amateurs" would make an effort, and give the movement an impetus from the spirit of the old society, we would before long have an institution which would prove more than local in its character, and attract visitors from all the country surrounding us to witness its performances.

Whether or not there were members of the earlier Amateur Dramatics organization, of which nothing is known, among the group of thespians who effected their organization at Thespian Hall September 7, 1871, is not recorded. George Camble and L. O. Hacker were elected president and vice president respectively of the new club. L. H. Montanye, secretary and treasurer, J. T. DeValcourt,

business manager, and Julius Robertson, stage manager, were the other officers. On September 30 the association gave its first performance, on which occasion Thespian Hall was "opened to the public," suggesting that the new theatre may not have been the same hall that was used by the French company in the Duperier building on Main Street. Lend Me Five Shillings and Stage-Struck Yankee were the plays chosen by the Iberia Thespians for their first public appearance. On October 26 the group presented Irish Attorney and More Blunders Than One; and Grimshaw, Bagshaw, and Bradshaw and The Happy Man, scheduled for November 25, were postponed until December 8 in order to permit necessary alterations to the Thespian Hall stage.⁹³

In the casts of these productions appeared names of eight actors: Julius Robertson, the director and stage manager; Ethan A. Dennett, associate publisher of the Planters' Banner and Times; L. H. Montanye, the association secretary and treasurer; C. D. DeValcourt; James Fourmy, a general plantation merchant; Robert H. Cage; a Mr. Masters; and a Mr. Patterson. Fourmy and Patterson played the feminine roles, and Robert H. Cage's work as comedian gained favorable comment in the reviews. Thomas Reynolds and Bill Johnson of the Franklin Minstrel troupe appeared in blackface novelties on the first Thespian Association program. Of the second program the Sugar Bowl editor said that Irish Attorney "seemed to drag, for want of proper time for rehearsal." Audiences were small at all the association's performances, certainly one factor leading to the decision of the group to discontinue activities early in 1872.⁹⁴

⁹³ Planters' Banner and Times, November 22, December 13, 1871.

⁹⁴ Ibid., December 13, 1871.

The Thespian Association assisted the Episcopal Church of New Iberia in the production of a New Year's pageant on January 1. The program was made up of an original pageant which combined tableaux and pantomime for moving dramatic effect.

. . . The curtain raising, revealed the Old Year sitting on his throne, and he was approached by Old Father Time, who, scythe and hour-glass in hand, reminded him that his race was almost run, and called upon him to give an account of the moments which were allotted him. The Old Year then summoned the Four Seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, who each in turn addressed Father Time. In order to lengthen out his moments, the Old Year asks Father Time to stay a little longer, promising to entertain him with festive scenes from his experience, to which Time reluctantly consented, and the Four Seasons retired to prepare the entertainment. Spring and her attendants then reappeared, and disclosed to Time the "Crowning of the May Queen"; Summer and her attendants then showed the pleasures of "A Summer Picnic"; Autumn and attendants presented a beautiful tableau "A Harvest Scene"; and Winter and attendants appeared last, pointing to a beautifully illuminated star, with the inscription around it, "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men" and a group of shepherdesses gaze with amazement and sing "Glory to God in the Highest." . . . Father Time expressed satisfaction that some of the moments allotted had been rightly spent, but reminded the Old Year that the sands were sinking fast, and bade him to prepare to yield his throne, sceptre and crown.

In the third part, the Four Seasons and their respective attendants reappear, singing a "Farewell Chorus" to the Old Year, while the Young Year is escorted on the stage by Christmas and Santa Claus; and as the clock struck twelve, Father Time removed the Old Year from the throne and placed the Young Year upon it and crowned him. Time and the Old Year then walked hand in hand slowly away; while the remaining characters sang a welcome chorus to the Young Year. . . .

Ethan A. Dennett appeared as Father Time, Robert H. Gage played the part of Old Year, C. D. DeValcourt was the Santa Claus; J. Border was Young Year; Mattie DeValcourt, Summer; Lizzie DeValcourt, Winter; Mattie Brannin, Spring; Mary DeValcourt, Autumn; Benjamin Schwing was Christmas; and the attendants of the Seasons included Sash DeValcourt,

Louise Jessup, Cecilia Gallup, Birdie Marsh, Katie Robertson, Dora Weeks, Lucy Jessup, and Fannie Marsh. Costumes were "in good keeping with the characters represented," and Thespian Hall was crowded with "the largest number of ladies and gentlemen we ever saw assembled at any place of amusement in New Iberia."⁹⁵

One other performance by the Iberia Thespian Association, a minstrel concert in which the "negro delineations were pronounced excellent," was given January 20, 1872. It was announced in the January 24 issue of the Planters' Banner and Times that certain young people "formerly connected with the Iberia Thespians" planned a dramatic performance "soon." Nothing more is known of the organization.

During August, 1872, Crisp's Troupe played in New Iberia. Their final performance was on August 24, a benefit appearance which netted \$110 for the volunteer fire company. About this time J. Levison of New Iberia joined Crisp's company. He made his debut as an actor with the Crisps in Thibodaux on December 22, appearing as Alonzo in Pizarro.⁹⁶ The Moncayo Troupe performed in New Iberia in November, closing its two-weeks visit with a complimentary benefit for the fire company. The Methodist Church of New Iberia sponsored a program of tableaux and charades at Thespian Hall on February 12 and 13, 1873. The charades and tableaux were "admirably selected to please and instruct."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Louisiana Sugar Bowl, January 4, 1872.

⁹⁶ Thibodaux Sentinel, December 28, 1872.

⁹⁷ Louisiana Sugar Bowl, February 13, 1873.

Nothing more is known of theatrical activities in New Iberia until January, 1877. At that time Thespian Hall had become Pickwick Hall. The Ida Lewis Company gave a performance on January 18. On January 21, 22, and 23 the Louisiane and California Minstrels gave "nightly exhibitions"; and on February 8 the Helen D'Este Dramatic Company opened an engagement with The Discarded Wife, or Marriage and Divorce. During the week ending with May 10 the Stuttz Dramatic Company closed a series of "public entertainments" in New Iberia, and on that date the Louisiana Sugar Bowl announced plans by which the Stuttz company proposed to spend the summer months in New Iberia and conduct a subscription theater.

. . . During the period of five months, or twenty weeks, they will play thirty times, giving one or two representations each week to subscribers only. A limited number of families will be admitted, so those who desire to avail themselves of the pleasure of these select theatricals should call early at Dr. Mesteyer's drug store before the list is filled. During that period, Mr. Stuttz proposes to present a series of tableaux representing Bible scenes, which will undoubtedly be very attractive. The balance of the time, the troupe proposes to spend visiting adjacent towns in Attakapas, and give public entertainments. . .

These subscription performances were not reported in the weekly newspapers during the period; moreover, there is evidence that the proposed plan did not work out successfully. Holy Cross College, a church school of New Iberia, advertised its commencement program of musical and theatrical entertainments for July 16 and 17. Ed Dillon, an actor and character song artist of the Stuttz company, was scheduled to appear on both programs. He did not appear on either program. In September the following editorial paragraph more suggests that the subscription plan did not work out:

Mr. Stutz.--We learn that this gentleman passed through this place last Friday, having arrived on the stage from Vermillionville, and gone--we know not where. Of course he does not expect to play here again, as promised.⁹⁸

On August 11, 1877, the leading citizens of New Iberia and surrounding parishes conducted a Grand Tournament and Ball for the general entertainment of the community. The processions, program of events, the costumes, and pageantry of the assembled spectators, as reported in the Louisiana Sugar Bowl, suggested the eagerness of the sponsors of the tournament to duplicate, in degree at least, the tournaments of Sir Walter Scott's creation.⁹⁹ A circus visited New Iberia during the winter of 1877-78, and

⁹⁸ Ibid., September 13, 1877.

⁹⁹ At ten o'clock in the morning the participants took part in a parade on Main Street: "First came the grand marshal, Mr. Theogene Viator, accompanied by assistant marshals Decuir, Clere, Stott, Wyche and King, then the band, the [sic] following in double rank. The Knight of Lonestar--G. Taylor Cade in costume Henry 8th. Knight of Mintmore, Robert Smedes in cavalier costume of Henry 8th. Knight of Richee, Alf. Barnard in cavalier costume Henry 8th. Knight of Bellevue, Overton Cade in cavalier costume Henry 8th. Knight of Somerville, John Weeks in cavalier costume Henry 8th. Knight of Rosedale, Wm. Cade in cavalier costume Henry 8th. Knight of Au Large, Doreilli Romero. Crusaders (!) Knight of La Saline, Jno. M. Avery; Knight of Leeds, John M. Robertson; Knight of Orange, Chas. B. Jefferson; Knight of Linden, Ernest Druilhett . . . Knight of Grand Coteau, David Weeks; Knight of Cypressmott, W. S. Bosworth. . . Knight of Petite Anse, Dudley Avery, cavalier costume Charles 1st. Knight of Alabama, Wm. Colgin, cavalier costume Charles 1st. Knight of Virginia, Audubon Hilliard, Scottish Knight. Knight of Teche, C. D. DeValcourt, costume under William the Conqueror. Knight of Mississippi, E. C. Barksdale, costume William the Conqueror. Knight of Enterprise, John R. Davis, costume William the Conqueror. Knight of Iberia, John J. Taylor, costume William the Conqueror. The costumes of every hue glittering, with gold and silver trimmings were very handsome, and buzzing comments of approbation could be heard on all sides. . ." The procession ended at the Tournament Grounds, the New Iberia race track, where grandstands had been erected to seat six hundred people. The knights drew for positions and took their places. Judges Breaux, Weeks, and Ferry announced the beginning of the tourney and had the rules read: "By the Tournament rules, the lance is to be from seven to nine feet long, distance from hand to point at least five feet. Each knight rides three times at three rings, nine in all, distance between rings, 100 feet, distance from the "go" to first ring, 100 feet, time to be made 10 seconds, rings, two inches in diameter. . ." The running of the twenty knights in the feature event was completed in an hour and a half. The second event was "the Glass Ball shooting match" and "The Grand Mule Race" described as "the struggle of the day; the most laughable part of the entertainment. . ." The winners of the knights' event chose the Queen of Love and Beauty and her Maids who ruled at the Grand Ball held in the grove of the Week's home. (Louisiana Sugar Bowl, August 16, 1877.)

on January 20, 1878, The Helen D'Este company began a week's engagement at Pickwick Hall with a production of Lucretia Borgia. From New Iberia the troupe went to Vermilionville, to Opelousas, and to other north Louisiana towns.¹⁰⁰

From the available information concerning theater activities in New Iberia during the Reconstruction period it is evident that a greater number of productions were given by professional companies than were given by community groups. There had been the Amateur Dramatics, a company of citizens, of which there is only an editorial reference. In 1871 a second group of young men organized the Iberia Thespian Association which discontinued its activities early in 1872 because its members were unable to spend time away from their vocations sufficient to make adequate preparation for productions and because there was an evident lack of community patronage to support the project. Miscellaneous church and school entertainments included tableaux, charades, and pageants in which a marked degree of originality was evident.

Opelousas

Non-professional theater in Opelousas following the close of the Civil War did not of necessity have a completely new beginning. The Varieties Theatre, owned and managed by the business firm of Bloch and Dupre before the war, was available to all who wished to use its stage. And Simon Richard, the local puppeteer and amateur chemist who began giving public exhibitions as early as 1856, simply renewed his theatrical activity after the war ended and continued the dominant

¹⁰⁰ Louisiana Sugar Bowl, January 24, 1878.

figure in community theater throughout the Reconstruction period. There were tableaux programs by which means the town's churches raised funds in support of their various activities; there were school dramatic programs, musical concerts, the occasional professional companies, and finally during the closing months of the period the organization of the Philharmonic Society and the Opelousas Social Circle with competent leadership and community patronage.

The earliest public entertainment recorded in Opelousas after the war was a lecture-demonstration by Simon Richard on January 25, 1866. The program included an "interesting exhibition on chemistry and physics," and "his experiments succeeded remarkably well."¹⁰¹ Richard was scheduled to present the program of experiments at Washington, Louisiana, on January 29. On March 19 a Grand Masquerade Ball was held at the Varieties Theatre, and on April 26 the Episcopal Church sponsored a program of tableaux and dramatic skits at the parish courthouse. Admission was one dollar; about one hundred and fifty persons attended the dramatic program and general fair which formed a part of the project.¹⁰² No other activities were reported until July 3, 1868, on which date the Methodist Church sponsored a fair and tableaux program at the parish courthouse under the direction of Mrs. J. H. Jackson, Cornelius Fusion, Claudius Mayo, Maggie White, and Ida Hayes. The following evening Simon Richard presented a fireworks display of his own devising on the courthouse

¹⁰¹ Opelousas Courier, January 27, 1866.

¹⁰² Ibid., April 21, May 6, 1866.

lawn; afterwards he gave an exhibition at the Varieties Theatre at which his marionettes were the attraction. Admission price was twenty-five cents.

On July 24 the Opelousas Episcopal Church presented at the Varieties theater a program of music, tableaux, and charades for the benefit of the church organ fund. The program had great variety; the three charades, When the Cat's Away the Mice Will Play, Phan--Tom, and Oil and Vinegar emphasized comedy; among the tableaux were Pride of the Harum, described as an Oriental scene, historical in conception, and faithfully grand in its exhibition with costumes assimilated tastefully to the nation typified, Dressing the Bride, a picture of life, Sage Conversation from Georgia Scenes, laughable colloquy between three old ladies, Execution of Mary Queen of Scots, and Past and Future. Vocal and instrumental music provided interludes between scenes. The admission price was fifty cents, and Varieties Theatre was "filled to its utmost capacity."¹⁰³

During the fall months of 1868 Simon Richard worked to improve the mechanism of his puppets, he worked out continuity including appropriate pantomime, and enlisted the assistance of "several amateurs" On November 26 Richard with his assistants gave at the Varieties Theatre "one of his varied and interesting entertainments. . . consisting of the Puppet Show, comprising the Naval Engagement, &c., &c., the whole to conclude with the laughable Pantomime of Vol Au Vent."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ibid., August 1, 1868.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., November 21, 1868.

The Courier editor announced in the issue of November 25 that the performance "attracted a large crowd" and "was a perfect success." The weekly suggested editorially to the group: "Complete your organization and go to work in earnest, young gentlemen of the embryo Thespian Association." A month later in its December 26 issue the Opelousas Journal announced the formation of the Opelousas Literary Society and its associate Thespian Corps:

. . . The young men of Opelousas, realizing the great scarcity of Literary, Scientific, and Classical books in our community, and from the financial adversity of its people, having been impressed with the impossibility of individual ability to supply this great mental nourishment, have organized a literary association for the purpose of establishing a corporate Library and Reading Room. The Society is regularly organized under a Constitution and By-Laws calculated to promote its truly meritorious object, and upon investigation is bound to invite the cordial support and affiliation of every well-wisher of intelligence and social enlightenment. . . . Connected with the Literary association is a Thespian corps of its members, who will give periodical entertainments of choice dramas, at the Varieties Theatre, for the purpose of creating a fund: first, to aid in establishing the Literary Society on a successful basis; and lastly, the residue of said fund to be donated to worthy charitable objects. Everything of a sectarian character is disclaimed, and it is specially announced that the relief fund which may accrue from the dramatic exhibitions will be subject to the claims of all objects of a charitable nature. . . .

The Thespian corps of the society presented Forest Rose with "new and appropriate scenery" at the Varieties Theatre on December 31, 1868. The weather was unfavorable and a small audience attended the group's first production. Other difficulties were met; however, the Journal reviewer insisted that "the Thespians have no reason to be ashamed of their first performance." The commentary concluded with the announcement that the entertainments would be continued indefinitely

"if a suitable house can be obtained." The announced need for a place to perform anticipated the July advertisement of L. Vatter, furniture store proprietor of Opelousas:

FURNITURE STORE.

The undersigned has removed his furniture store to the Varieties Theatre, where he has also established his work-shop. Those who wish to purchase new furniture will there find a good assortment. He will also repair furniture; and buy old furniture or exchange new for old. . . L. VATTER.¹⁰⁵

The Varieties Theater having become a furniture store and workshop, sponsors of a benefit entertainment on September 23 gave their program of "charades, music, and ballads" at the residence of Judge Overton. The reviews made special comment on the effectiveness of Sense vs. Sentiment, Scene from Pickwick, and Tin Wedding, in which the performers ". . . exhibited such proficiency in the histrionic art as to be readily mistaken for professionals."

Tournaments and the accompanying Grand Balls provided amusement for Opelousas citizens during the spring of 1870. On February 18 Opelousas citizens on invitation participated in a tourney conducted by the neighboring community of Bellevue. On February 25 the Opelousas horsemanship enthusiasts conducted a tournament and held the "Tournament Hop" at Johnston's Hotel. By March two tournament associations had been organized, since married men and bachelors were not suited competitors for the singular honor of naming the Queen of Love and Beauty who reigned at the grand tournament ball. On March 19 the Young Men's Association met the challenging Married Men's association in the most elaborately planned tournament recorded in Opelousas.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., July 31, 1869.

At eleven o'clock the Knights of the two associations marched in procession from the courthouse to the field of combat. The married knights were identified by a blue sash worn around the waist and a blue rosette fastened on the hat; the bachelor knights, by sash and rosette of red. The Opelousas Brass Band headed the march and "enlivened the exercise with martial music." Preceding the contest J. J. Morgan addressed the general audience, introduced the knights, and stated the purpose of the meeting. E. T. Lewis and Laurent Dupre gave the response of the married knights and bachelor knights respectively. Dr. James G. Campbell, S. B. Harmon, and J. W. Jackson were appointed judges of the competition; and Claudius Mayo, proprietor of the Opelousas Drug Store, served as Grand Marshal over the activities. Simple rules governed the procedure: knights of the two associations rode alternately, the married men commencing. Each contestant had three rides, and all riders were required to remain in ranks except when they were actually running the course; the captain of each group decided the order in which his knights should ride. To the knight making the best time and taking the greatest number of rings was awarded the crown, the highest award of the contest. The first wreath was awarded to the company accumulating the largest number of rings in the aggregate and to the highest individual in that group. The second wreath was to be awarded to the highest scorer on the list of either company excluding the winners of the crown and first wreath. Two other contests were held on the course following the main event. The first was an exhibition by "persons masked and dressed in Mardi Gras style, with barrel hoops for rings and sticks for lances"; the second of

the extra events was a tourney for boys. Activities closed with the conventional grand ball at Johnston's Hotel.¹⁰⁶

Between October, 1870, and January, 1871, Mrs. Laura S. Webb, a lecturer and dramatic reader, gave a series of programs at the St. Landry Parish courthouse. Mrs. Webb's first program on November 5 featured her reading of an original poetic eulogy entitled The Requiem of General Robert E. Lee. The program planned for November 28 for the joint benefits of the Opelousas fire department and Mrs. Webb, featured a lecture entitled The Women of the South, a pantomime entitled The Four Seasons, both by Mrs. Webb; scenes from Macbeth, and the farce Box and Cox by Mrs. Webb and others.¹⁰⁷ Because of "insufficient preparation" the performance was postponed until December 3, and the program was altered "at the last moment" to include an oration by Laurent J. Dupre and tableaux by a group of children, who were directed by Mrs. Webb. The beneficiary "sustained her reputation as a reader," and her lecture entitled The Women of the South was "ably composed and gracefully delivered."¹⁰⁸ On December 12 a third program, also sponsored by the volunteer fire department, presented Mrs. Webb as lecturer on "The Resources of Louisiana" and "Tableaux, dramas, and music." On January 3 Simon Richard volunteered the services of his puppet troupe for the benefit of Mrs. Webb. The large courtroom was crowded, and the Journal editor wrote at length of the decided success of the performances: An amusing lovers' quarrel, in verse, by Richard and

¹⁰⁶ Opelousas Journal, March 26, 1870.

¹⁰⁷ Opelousas Courier, November 26, 1870.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., December 10, 1870; Journal, December 10, 1870.

Mrs. Webb; John T. Healey's impersonation of "a jolly Dutchman" expounding the merits of his "pooty leetle pootle tog." Of the marionette performance the reviewer continued:

. . . They are some ten or twelve in number, and represent man and several other animals, in their various races, costumes, characters and occupations. We venture to say there is not another person in the world that can work puppets like Mr. Richard. He made them walk, talk, sing, dance, hug, kiss, ride, sleep and take every position and perform every feat possible for a real person to do. . . Several ladies and gentlemen present, who had witnessed puppet shows in New Orleans and Europe, said they had never seen any equal to Mr. Richard's. . . .¹⁰⁹

Following the January performance, Mrs. Webb took a position as teacher in the Opelousas "female public school." Sometime during the next year she moved to St. Louis where she joined the editorial staff of Sunday Morning, a weekly publication. A year later, in May, 1873, the former Opelousas lecturer and teacher established in St. Louis The Western Sun, her own weekly newspaper.¹¹⁰

During 1872 theater activity in Opelousas included Simon Richard's annual Fourth of July production, a short engagement at the courthouse by the W. H. Crisp Company, and two unsuccessful attempts to organize a local theater company. Richard presented a more elaborate program on July 4, 1872, than he had in former years. The Masonic Hall was fitted up for the theater, and certain acts in addition to the puppetry were added, in which the acting of Richard, his son T. S. Richard, John T. Healey, and a Mr. Porter

¹⁰⁹ Journal, January 7, 1871.

¹¹⁰ Courier, April 27, 1872; May 3, 1873.

of Franklin gained particularly favorable comments in the Journal.¹¹¹ On August 13 a dramatic entertainment by "the ladies" of the town was given at the Overton Residence, the second performance to be given at the residence since the Varieties Theater closed in 1869. The Crisps performed nightly at the parish courthouse from September 4 to the 14. In its September 21 issue the Journal announced the formation of two dramatic companies in Opelousas:

. . . The first is said to be a stock company who expect shortly to fit up a regular Theatre and procure a stock of professional actors. The second is one formed among the young gentlemen of this place, for the mutual improvement and amusement. They last night organized and elected the following gentlemen as officers:

A. P. Williams, Manager; J. W. Jackson, Treasurer;
C. J. Thompson, Secretary; E. P. Veazie, Door-Keeper;
Austin Williams and J. J. Thompson, Bill Posters.

S. M. Drake and Harry Clayton, former members of W. H. Crisp's company, were joint sponsors of the move to establish a professional stock company in Opelousas. On October 12 the Journal reported:

. . . We are authorized to announce that the Supreme Court room has been secured and is now being fitted up as a Theatre under the auspices of several enterprising citizens of this place, who have resolved themselves into a stock company and raised a fund for that purpose. . . .

"The Opelousas Theatre" will be opened under the joint management of Messrs. S. M. Drake and Harry Clayton, both gentlemen of experience and ability in the dramatic art. . . .

To Clayton was given the task of recruiting a corps of actors from the professional ranks in New Orleans. Drake in the meantime made necessary alterations to the courtroom and provided stage space and scenery. According to the initial advertisement which appeared in the

¹¹¹ July 6, 1872.

Courier on October 26, the Opelousas Theatre was scheduled to open to the public on November 2, presenting a "full and competent company of Metropolitan artists" in the "romantic and highly interesting drama entitled The Sea of Ice or The Wild Flower of Mexico." A special note at the close of the advertisement indicated that the public safety of the theater audience had had some previous discussion: "The public is respectfully informed that the braces of the Courthouse have been tightened, and the building is now as safe as on the day it was built." The troupe of actors whom Clayton allegedly engaged in New Orleans did not arrive in Opelousas, and the management announced, barely a week before the scheduled opening of the theater, that the W. H. Crisp Family had been engaged for the opening performances at the new theater. There was no further mention of the Opelousas Theater in the weekly newspapers during the season. That the theater opened for a brief period is indicated by a comment published the following July:

Mrs. Eliza Crisp, wife of Capt. W. H. Crisp, late manager of the "Opelousas Theatre," died at Waco, Texas, on the 25th ult., in the 56th year of her age. She was born in Portsmouth, England, in 1817.¹¹²

The initial publicity given the forming stock company during October, 1872, crowded out anything that might have been said by or for the newly organized community group. The fate of the club was probably pronounced when the Drake-Clayton group arranged to convert the parish courthouse into a theater; thus the non-professional did nothing further at that time to provide amusements.

¹¹² Courier, July 5, 1873.

At his July 4, 1873, performance at the courthouse Simon Richard was greeted with a capacity audience. His puppets and the display of fireworks had become tradition. On August 2, the pupils of the Ursuline Academy of Opelousas presented Le Triomphe de la Foi, ou le Veritable Amie, a two act French drama, from a temporary stage erected in one of the large rooms at the school.

In 1874 Simon Richard worked to effect a satisfactory technique with shadow pantomime. On February 26 he "surprised our community" with one of his "unique entertainments" in which he "fully sustained his well won reputation as a successful showman." For his annual July 4 program Richard advertised "for the first time in this place, the SHADOW PANTOMIME, DISSOLVING VIEWS, &c. . .to conclude with his laughable and inimitable PUPPETS." The old Varieties Theatre had again been available for use as a theater, and on this occasion "notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather and the great paucity of money, the old 'Varieties Theatre' was crammed and jammed. . . ." Reviewing the performance in the issue of July 11, 1874, the Courier editor wrote the usual comments descriptive of the "inimitable puppets, which counterfeited so truly pigmy realizations of actual life, . . ." and indicated the great skill of Richard in presenting the other parts of his entertainment:

. . .The shadow pantomimes were a perfect success, and could only be appreciated by actually witnessing their representation. Few understand the study required for a proper posturing to give a striking effect to these tableaux, and the difficulty of maintaining that angle of light which will secure their faithful definition. . . .

During 1875 the Opelousas Grange No. 86 assumed the management of Varieties Building where the local organization held its

weekly meetings.¹¹³ However, the theater was made available to groups wishing to produce entertainments for the community. The Southern Combination Troupe, a professional company, gave a program of songs, dances, farces, music, etc., at Grangers' Hall on April 26. On July 6 a group of citizens organized the Harmony Social Club of Opelousas, the object of which was "social pleasure and amusement of ladies and gentlemen." The group rented a clubroom and elected the following officers: M. G. May, president; Dr. Wm. M. Thompson, vice-president; Charles Bloch, recording and corresponding secretary; L. A. Hebert, financial secretary; Solomon Bloch, treasurer. The other active members were T. S. Bailey, R. Beaud, B. A. Guidry, E. Dejean, Austin D. Williams, S. R. Walker, J. J. Thompson, and A. Levy. The Harmony Social Club evidently made no effort to provide amusement for anyone other than members of their own group; this being the case, the group was not long kept before public notice in the weekly newspaper.

On February 16 and 17, 1876, members of the Episcopal Church presented variety programs of tableaux, charades, and music at the Varieties. Among the scenes were often repeated ones like Sense vs. Sentiment, A Sage Conversation, and Matrimony. In April Simon Richard began drawing together what he described as his "great Combination Show" with which he proposed traveling among the towns of Louisiana and eastern Texas. On July 4 the entire program was given a tryout under the tent provided for the traveling show. Puppetry, magic, and comic and dramatic reading made up the program.

¹¹³ Ibid., April 10, 1875.

The Helen D'Este Company was in Opelousas for performances in February, 1877,¹¹⁴ On the 27th of the same month a new group of citizens interested in community theater organized the Varieties Dramatic Association of Opelousas. Officers elected at the first meeting included William F. Anderson, president; Alphonse Levy, vice-president; Charles Bloch, secretary; A. P. Williams, treasurer; and Charles E. Thompson, stage manager. Additional members were Austin Lacombe, G. L. Dupre, Charles F. Garland, W. C. Perrault, Charles R. Mayer, Octave Perrault, John D. Thompson, Charles W. Richard, E. C. Quirk, Charles M. Thompson, Paul Richard, and Austin D. Williams. Among these were the names of those young men who had attempted to organize a non-professional group at the time the Clanton-Blade stock company was being formed. In July and August a small number of boys—Morty and George Liberman, Billy Perrott, Isadore Munzesheimer and others—organized the Opelousas Juveniles, who gave dramatic performances in the homes of the various members of the club.¹¹⁵ The success or failure of Simon Richard's proposed 1876-1877 tour is not discussed in the Opelousas newspapers of the period. Indeed it cannot be ascertained the locally popular puppeteer began the tour. Nevertheless, showman Richard was again in Opelousas in September, 1877, with an entirely new show. With the aid of his sons, Simon presented on the stage of the Old Varieties Theater on October 4, a troupe of five performing dogs, "small dogs, generally mixed breeds, picked up about the country. . . ." In reviewing a preview rehearsal performance of September 26, the

¹¹⁴ Journal, February 10, 1877.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., August 4, 1877.

Journal editor explained that the dogs had been trained by Richard at his home and that training routines had always been conducted during the daylight hours. At the theater,

. . . Their performances were simply wonderful. We have seen many trained horses, dogs, &c., in shows and circuses; but Prof. Richard's little dogs beat them all, they can perform more tricks and perform them better. He has one dog that can distinguish colors. We guarantee that all who attend the Professor's dog show will see the best educated class of dogs they will ever see again, . . . The horse rolling the barrel in the circus is nothing to what these dogs can do with a barrel,—they can roll it backwards and forward without changing positions. Standing on the hind legs, and dancing, are nothing; these dogs stand on the fore legs, with heels in the air, and run the gauntlet on a narrow suspended plank. . . .

Naturally, Varieties Theater on October 4 held a capacity audience.

Admission price to the dog show was fifty cents.¹¹⁶

On January 29, 1878 Helen Mante with her company began a brief engagement at the Varieties Theater. On the 16 day of February Simon Richard again announced an exhibition, his having made "important additions to his already attractive repertoire." For this particular program, which was not reviewed by either of the weekly newspapers, Richard announced "besides his well trained performing dogs, his puppets, &c., he had secured, at considerable expense, a couple of those wonderful rarities, Albinos—a boy and a girl, 3 and 7 years old respectively. . . ."¹¹⁷

By the beginning of 1879, two years after the organization of the Varieties Dramatic Association, the club had not had a single

¹¹⁶ Courier, October 6, 1877.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., February 9, 1878.

In April Prof. Rudolph Mayer, a music teacher in Opelousas, organized the Philharmonic Association of Opelousas. With a membership of eight the music club presented public concerts at the Varieties Theater on June 4 and July 7. In encouraging comments the Opelousas weekly papers wrote less of individual performances and more of the spirit of the organization. They asked interested citizens to organize to promote the establishment of a town library, to promote the drama and literature.¹¹⁹

On July 12, the Catholic Convent sponsored a benefit fair at which Simon Richard presented his puppets and his trained dogs. Two weeks later Mrs. Helen Donato, teacher at the Negro school, planned to present her pupils in a program of "songs, declamations, charades and dramas" at Varieties Hall. Admission price to the exhibition was twenty-five cents. The funds were to be used for the purchase of desks and benches for the school.¹²⁰ Also during the month of July, 1879, another group of Opelousans completed organization of the Opelousas Social Circle, "an association whose object and purpose," the Courier issue of July 26 reported, "to be the promotion and cultivation of literature, music and the drama." The first officers, elected for a term of three months, included F. F. Perrodin, president; C. H. Anderson, first vice president; Mrs. Rosa Hebrard, second vice president; A. P. Williams, recording secretary; W. C. Perrault, financial secretary; Mrs. T. M. Anderson, treasurer, C. M. Richard, musical director; Paul

¹¹⁹ St. Landry Democrat, April 26, 1879; Courier, June 7, 1879.

¹²⁰ Courier, July 26, 1879.

Richard, sergeant at arms; and Simon Richard, stage manager. The Social Circle, which increased its membership to more than fifty members, gave its first performance on August 6 at the Varieties. The play was a farce, Brown the Martyr, or The Jealous Husband; vocal music and a dramatic reading, by C. B. Anderson, completed the program. This initial performance was reported as an "impromptu rehearsal" by the Courier, and probably only an invited audience attended. On September 30, the Social Circle gave its first public performance. The play was The Pride of the Market, a three-act comedy affording acting roles for ten members of the club. The Mistake was the afterpiece. Simon Richard, the aging stage manager of the organization, directed the program. During the weeks of rehearsal Richard remodeled and enlarged the Varieties Theater stage; he painted three complete sets of scenery for the play: a market scene for the first act, a hotel at Versailles for the second act, and a garden scene for the final act. Costumes, made by members of the club, "harmonized well with the characters represented."

Two weeks after the Social Circle's first public performance the Philharmonic Association gave a production of a three-act operetta entitled Lily Bell, the Culprit Fay. Helen Perkins directed the all-girl cast in the operetta and Rudolph Mayer conducted the orchestra. The costumes for the "characters of fairy land" were charmingly represented, wrote the Courier editor after seeing the dress rehearsal performance on October 7. Describing the stage effects the editor continued:

. . . Eudora, the Naiad queen, will be seen to emerge from the rock in which he was enclosed

by the wizard, Almansor Beryl. In the background will be a beautiful landscape painting, executed by the artistic brush of Prof. Mayer, representing the romantic entrance to Lake Como, in Switzerland. The perspective of this scene is most charming, and will add much to the effects of this splendid operetta. . . .¹²¹

In October the Social Circle re-elected most of the first group of officers for the second three-month period. Mrs. J. J. Thompson was elected second vice-president, replacing Mrs. Rosa Hebrard; E. C. Perrault, recording secretary; W. G. Anderson, financial secretary; Chas. Bloch, treasurer; and R. D. Milstead, sergeant at arms. Major O. Voorhies, an actor in the first play, directed the Circle's production of Robertson's Caste on December 5. Box and Cox was the afterpiece, and the brief review indicated that the plays were "excellently" performed.

In these early productions of the Philharmonic Association and the Opelousas Social Circle during the closing months of 1879, thirty-two people appeared. Total memberships of the groups were reported to be much larger. Audiences were large and enthusiastic. The weekly newspaper indicated citizens from Washington, Grand Coteau, and smaller outlying communities in St. Landry parish attended the performances. Prof. Rudolph Mayer of the Philharmonic and Simon Richard of the Social Circle were capable leaders of their respective organizations. Thus at the close of the Reconstruction Period non-professional theater activities became organized, predicting a more purposeful and successful community theater during the more prosperous period during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

¹²¹ Ibid., October 11, 1879.

The years of the Reconstruction period was a time of exceptional community theatrical activity among the towns of the southern Louisiana Bayou Country. During the early years between 1866 and 1870 church organizations, school groups, and volunteer fire companies sponsored variety programs of tableaux, charades, and vocal and instrumental music. Many people participated in the programs; others prepared and managed the sale of refreshments; leaders developed as program directors and as business managers. Whole community populations in attending these variety programs found wholesome amusement and cultivated a degree of appreciation for theatrical entertainment. The early miscellaneous variety programs motivated the formation of numerous well organized theatrical groups during the 1870's.

The amateur dramatic clubs in south Louisiana consisted generally of large memberships. They varied little in organization; however, the scope and variety of activity distinguished two general classifications. More numerous and prosperous were the theatrical associations which limited activities to regular dramatic theater programs. Prominent among these groups were the Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band Theatrical Association (1872-1877), led by Bernard Leman, J. J. Claverie and Mr. B. Claverie; The Plaquemine Dramatic Association (c.1874-1879), directed by John H. Shanks; and the Young Men's Dramatic Association of Plaquemine (1879), led by Paul Lebaube. In Thibodaux were the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche (1874-1877), with prominent leaders in Thomas A. Badeaux, Silas T. Grisamore, I. D. and C. M. Moore and Emile Loiseau; and the St. Joseph Dramatic Club sponsored by the Catholic church and its allied Thibodaux College (1879).

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Along Bayou Teche were the New Iberia Amateur Dramatics (before 1871) and the Iberia Thespian Association (1871-1873) directed by Julius Robertson and George Gamble; and the Grand Coteau Amateur Dramatic Association (1872-c.1876). Although specific objectives of these dramatic associations varied in details, they consistently established their organization to furnish theatrical entertainment for their respective communities, to provide for the mutual improvement and amusement of their members, and to contribute funds to civic and religious organizations and to charities. Programs regularly consisted of a number of short plays: standard one and two-act English comedies and farces, Ethiopian farces, comic songs, and humorous and serious dramatic readings. The Donaldsonville, Thibodaux, and Grand Coteau associations frequently included short French comedies and comic operas. Only the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche restricted membership to young men, a number of whom specialized in playing feminine roles in the productions.

Community theaters were frequently second story halls in business houses. The Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band Hall and Plaquemine's Union Fire Company Hall were designed and built as theaters. Thibodaux's Waverley Hall, New Iberia's Thespian Hall, and Opelousas Varieties Theater were converted business buildings. Stages were usually not large, and stock scenery served for many performances. Among the staff members of the dramatic organizations was the scenic artist who provided new scenes for particularly demanding plays and for musical productions. Special costumes, wigs, and make-up were kept in stock; however, little is known of their use.

The second important type of organization included the combination literary, social, and theatrical societies. This group of organizations were predominantly exemplified by The Young Men's Social Club (1877-1878); The Abbeville Literary Society and Dramatic Club (1876-1879); The Grand Coteau Social Club (1879); and four clubs in Opelousas: the Opelousas Literary Society and Associated Thespian Corps (1868), the Harmony Club (1875), the Opelousas Social Circle (1879), and the Philharmonic Association (1879). In general organization and purpose these groups did not differ materially from the regular dramatic clubs. Their activities were more inclusive: they gave less frequent dramatic performances; they sponsored musical recitals and concerts; and on occasion they conducted purely literary entertainments. The Philharmonic Society and Social Circle of Opelousas became the theater groups of the town, the former presenting operettas chiefly, and the latter, regular programs consisting of a standard full-length play and an afterpiece.

Other types of theatrical organizations were present with varying degrees of prominence. Minstrel troupes were not as numerous in south Louisiana during the period as they were in other sections of the state. Franklin's Minstrel Company, organized and directed by Thomas Reynolds and Bill Johnson in 1870, and the Thibodaux Variety Minstrels in 1877 were the only companies of which there is record. The pageantry of tournaments with accompanying coronation balls in Opelousas during 1870 and in New Iberia in 1877 had great audience appeal and required skill on the part of the performers. Band organizations were important to the program of activities of dramatic groups

particularly in Donaldsonville, Plaquemine and Thibodaux. The Fêtes Champêtres conducted by the volunteer fire companies in Thibodaux and Plaquemine were spectacular in the variety and scope of their activities. Juvenile theater groups contributed to sustained interest in theater by training young actors. Two prominent groups were the Fire Fly Dramatics of Plaquemine (1879) and the Opelousas Juveniles (1877).

A number of performers built individual reputations for specific work in their community theaters. Laura S. Webb as a dramatic reader and lecturer in Opelousas, O. E. Tate of Grasse Île and A. C. Ellis of Assumption Parish provided full-evening entertainments. C. M. and I. N. Moore, Thomas A. Badaux, Emile Loiseau, R. R. McBride, and Silas T. Grismore became audience favorites with their comic and character readings in Thibodaux. Particularly outstanding was the versatile Simon Richard of Opelousas who produced puppet shows, excelled in shadow pantomime, was a skilled amateur magician, and contributed to group activities as actor, director, and scenic artist in his community. The people in no other section of Louisiana were more consistently successful in providing wholesome community theater than those in the southern Louisiana Bayou Country during the Reconstruction period.

CHAPTER VIII

NORTHEAST LOUISIANA

Lake Providence

In Northeast Louisiana Monroe and Lake Providence were the economic centers of the area. Monroe was centrally located: it had rail connection with the Mississippi river at Vicksburg after 1860, and the Ouachita provided a navigable waterway for river commerce. Lake Providence, the center of a rich cotton-growing section and parish seat of East Carroll parish, had prospered in its Mississippi River commerce.

As the citizens of Lake Providence proceeded with their necessary adjustments following the close of the war, they did not neglect to cultivate means of restoring and maintaining community morale through community sponsored amusements. As early as 1868 the people had organized a community debating society,¹ and an amateur musical company was "about being formed" in 1869. On a Monday night in April, 1873, "in the large room over the store of W. R. C. Lyons," rehearsals were conducted for a series of tableaux being prepared for performance by friends of the Methodist Church.² These group activities served to create community-wide interests in the social and cultural aspects of program production. By 1875 the volunteer fire department of Lake Providence had built a public hall which not

¹ Carroll Record, May 2, 1868.

² Carroll Republican, April 5, 1873.

only became the center of community social activities but was equipped as a community theater. The amount of amateur theatrical activity during the period before 1875 is not known; however, Judge Moss had become the "jovial favorite" by May 12, on which date the firemen sponsored a festival and dramatic performance at Firemen's Hall. Quite A Hard Test was the play, and a spelling match and a dinner were other events of the evening. Katie Ranaaldsen, a guest of the J. W. Kennedy Family, Judge Moss, Professor Jayne, and Mattie Smithe appeared in the comedy and the editor of the local paper reported that ". . . the affair socially and financially, was a complete success."³

The other theater programs were given at Firemen's Hall during the summer of 1875. A Kiss in the Dark and Betsy Baker were the plays for a Firemen's Hall benefit sponsored by the Grace Church Mite Society on May 28. The second program was a concert and tableaux entertainment for the benefit of the Catholic Church presented by the Lake Providence Amateur Club on July 5, 1875. Judge Moss, who evidently directed the early plays, was assisted by the "Misses Austins, etc.," in the May 28 program. No review of the production was published, though the Watchman editor heard many "compliments paid Miss Missouri Austin for her playing on the occasion." The plays were given to assist the firemen in paying for the new hall. Admission was fifty cents. Of the performers in the church benefit concert-tableaux program no comment was made. However, the group probably consisted of those who had performed in the farces in May,

³ Carroll Watchman, May 13, 1875.

their number being augmented to meet requirements for presenting tableaux.

A group of professional actors who designated themselves as the Bailey Troupe appeared in Lake Providence during May and June, 1875. Their occasional concerts were often given with assistance by local amateurs, especially the Laddy Boys and members of the Providence String Band. Their feature acts were minstrel varieties, and on one occasion the receipts were given to the Firemen's Hall fund.⁴ Thorne's Southern Comedy Company played My Uncle's Will and the farce called The Yankee Duelist on November 27. According to the editorial notice, this was the "first traveling comedy company of the kind that . . . ever visited our town." No further information concerning amateur theatrical activities in Lake Providence is available until 1883, a time when amateurs were flourishing at Cohn's Opera House.

Monroe

Soon after the close of the war T. P. Ailes, a dancing teacher, opened an academy in Monroe. The editor of the local weekly advised the public to "patronize him and let us have merry times again."⁵ Metcalfe's Circus gave a two-day exhibition during the following February. There were merry times, but on this occasion the same editor wrote:

Metcalfe's "Great St. Louis Circus" spent two days at this place, gave four exhibitions and carried off a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars in

⁴ Ibid., May 20, 1875.

⁵ Monroe Ouachita Telegraph, January 4, 1866.

ready cash. The Sheriff made a haul on the concern for a parish tax of two hundred dollars, but by putting up his pavilion outside the corporate limits, Mr. Metcalfe suchered the town out of a hundred dollars. . . .⁶

The writer had much to say about the low quality of the performance, but more significant was his suggestion to the citizens of Monroe that money taken away contributed nothing toward rebuilding the community. The two commentaries were not inconsistent. Monroe set about rehabilitating her institutions which had gone unattended during the war. At the same time the people created greater interests in their social condition.

The Monroe Dramatic Association, formed in September 1867, served the two dominant needs of the village. It furnished wholesome amusement, a stimulant to morale; it contributed funds to repair the town. Specific information concerning the nature of the association's organization is lacking; however, the members were available to give performances under the sponsorship of any local organization that made the request. The apparent objective of the group, other than to provide for the amusement of its members, was to serve the cause of benevolence.

The plays of the Monroe Thespian Association were selected from among those which were popular in the city theaters before the war. Toodles, Box and Cox, The Limerick Boy, and The People's Lawyer were typical choices. Schiller's The Robbers was an important play in the repertoire. It was produced successfully in July, 1868, by the Thespians; and the Monroe Philharmonic Society gave the play again in 1876.

⁶ Ibid., February 28, 1867.

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS
MONROE THESPIANS,

At Female Academy,

WEDNESDAY,
September 25, 1867.

THE TOODLES.

DOMESTIC DRAMA!

In Two Acts.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Charles Fenton,..... E. DREYFUS.
Farmer Acorn,..... G. P. BLUNDELL.
George Acorn,..... J. G. RICHARDSON.
Mr. Timothy Toodles,..... L. W. SURGNOR.
Lawyer Gibb,..... GUAY CHAPMAN.
Farmer Fenton,..... G. L. C. HERNDON.
1st Farmer,..... S. W. BENNETT.
2nd Farmer,..... L. DREYFUS.
Landlord,..... JOHN STEVENS.
Mary Acorn,..... Miss HERRING.
Mrs. Tabitha Toodles,..... Mrs. YEOMANS.

AFTER PIECE.

Box and Cox!

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ:

Cox,..... D. A. BREARD.
Box,..... W. H. DINKGRAVE.
Mrs. Bouncer,..... Miss PRESTIGE.

Doors open at half-past 7, P. M.; performance
to commence at 8 o'clock, P. M.

Admission \$1: Children under 12
50 cts. half price.

OUACHITA TELEGRAPH
Monroe, September 12, 1867

Audiences at the amateur programs were generally large and appreciative. Since the plays were given for the benefit of community projects, the people found in them a means of supporting home institutions and a source of amusement. On September 25, 1867, the association gave a program at the hall of the Monroe Female Academy for the benefit of the school. Admission was one dollar.⁷ Subsequent productions were given at Union Church.

N. H. Dinkgrave, L. W. Surghnor, G. P. Blundell, E. Dreyfus, J. G. Richardson, and S. W. Bennett were the young people who assumed the roles of greatest importance in the plays. Among other members of the organization were D. A. Breard, Guay Chapman, G. L. C. Herndon, L. Dreyfus, John Stevens, Miss Herring, Mrs. Yeomans, Miss Prestige, and Miss Cockerham. In addition to his acting roles, Smith Bennett designed and painted the scenery. For the production of The Robbers the "scenery was excellent, and contributed a great deal towards making the performance agreeable and entertaining."⁸ The whole performance went off well, and the performers acquitted themselves with credit. However, following the second performance of the German classic July 15, the editor became at once critic and teacher in addressing the young actors:

Young gentlemen, as you have retired for the present let us advise you to correct a few faults. Not quite so much declamation; a little more animation; think less of the audience and don't address yourselves so much to it. For the purposes of the play you must in a measure ignore its existence, and not turn to it for approbation.

⁷ Ibid., September 12, 26, 1867.

⁸ Ibid., July 8, 1868.

It is the momentary forgetfulness of the fictitious, and a belief in the real existence of the same that keep up the interest. Anything that interrupts this, mars the pleasure of the play. Avoid these. You have done remarkably well, and have cause to congratulate yourselves.⁹

It was probably due to the absence of capable leadership and a suitable theater that the Monroe Thespian Association disbanded temporarily in 1869 in favor of the Monroe Literary and Debating Club.¹⁰

In October, 1870, Levi North organized a group of young Monroe amateurs into a variety troupe, proposing to perform during the winter months in Monroe and the neighboring towns. Advertised as Levi North's Combination, the troupe prepared elaborate variety routines for their opening performance at the parish courthouse on October 20. An afternoon parade by the company in costumes, preceded by a brass band attracted a large audience to the first performance. The variety of the program and the favorable response of the audience impressed the editor of the Ouachita Telegraph. Reviewing the performance a week later he commended the work of the company.

. . . This is a home show, originating with some of our best young and middle-aged men, and is a combination of extravaganzas, burlesques, songs, acrobatic feats, negro minstrelsy, &c., which, as exhibited Thursday evening at the Courthouse, would do credit to the boards of any large city. The introduction to the night's performance consisted of an afternoon's public parade, by members dressed in fancy costumes, headed by the Brass Band seated in a wagon drawn by four splendid iron-grey horses. The turn-out was really fine, and was immensely enjoyed by our citizens. . . .¹¹

⁹ Ibid., July 22, 1868.

¹⁰ Ibid., January 20, 1869.

¹¹ Ibid., October 22, 1870.

Having organized for the immediate purpose of raising funds to contribute to the building of a town hall, North's Combination continued with performances on October 21 and 22. New numbers including the speeches of "Mr. Bones" and the dances of Lingard and Edwards, merited special mention, as did the acrobatic feats of the Hanlons. The October 22 program was given exclusively for colored people. They, however, ". . . failed to attend in any number, it having been circulated that it was a 'Democratic Show.' . . ." and the further activity of the amateur troupe was not reported.

Former members of the Monroe Thespians joined in a two-evening benefit for the Episcopal Church the following December. Slasher and Crasher and My Neighbor's Wife, standard farces, and "original sketches, songs, and Tableaux Vivants representing interesting scenes from the best authors . . ." made up the programs. Performances took place at Union Church, and ". . . scenery (was) prepared and costumes adapted regardless of expense,"¹²

A disastrous fire which swept through a large part of the town on December 30-31, 1871, destroyed Union Church. For a time the only remaining halls suitable for community entertainments were those of the two academies. These were used infrequently as public halls until 1874 when the boys' academy sponsored a theater club known as St. Matthew's Dramatic Society. The club was organized to provide both amusement and dramatic training for the students and faculty of the academy; however, amateurs not connected with the school appeared in productions. The earliest of the programs mentioned in the weekly

¹² Ibid., December 10, 17, 1870.

newspaper were given at the academy hall on September 2 and 3, 1874. Between September and the close of April, 1875, the society gave ten performances netting the school fund approximately one thousand dollars.¹³

During the spring of 1875 a group of young men organized the Ouachita Ethiopian Serenaders, a minstrel troupe similar to the Levi North Combination some five years earlier. The Serenaders gave performances at the Male Academy Hall in February and March, featuring "Dutch and Ethiopian specialties." Audiences were large at the first performances; however, attendance grew less despite the fact that the troupe presented "entirely new programmes" each time, and the company soon became inactive.

On April 1 the St. Matthew Dramatic Society presented a special program consisting of the melodrama Ireland As It Is and a farce An April Phool. And on April 29 the Presbyterian Church sponsored a benefit program in which leading Monroe amateurs gave Woodcock's Little Game and The Toodles.

The Monroe Philharmonic Society, organized in May, 1874, as an exclusive music group, leased the academy hall early in May, 1875, proposing to present public performances regularly. The society gained community-wide commendation for their presentation of The Drunkard's Warning and The Limerick Boy on May 12 and 13. Activities of the Philharmonics during the summer months were not reported; moreover, an editorial query which appeared in the Ouachita Telegraph on November 5 suggested an extended absence of the group from the stage of their academy hall. "What has become of the Philharmonic

¹³ Ibid., April 30, 1875.

Society?" the editor asked, and reminded the group that ". . . the long and pleasant nights and the increase of the volume of loose change suggest active employment for the talented artists of the Society." In the meantime the Male Academy's dramatic club gave two performances of Lady Audley's Secret, the second presentation scheduled for September 4 as entertainment for delegates from some fifty-two chapters of the Louisiana State Grange attending their annual convention in Monroe at the time.¹⁴

The Philharmonic Society scheduled a program of "vocal and instrumental music, Comic Songs, . . . (and) the side splitting farce of The Irish Tiger. . . ." at their hall on December 11. Interest in the music and dramatic club's activities grew gradually less on the part of the local weekly. The final notice to appear announced a scheduled performance of Schiller's The Robbers on January 10, 1876. As if he needed to reassure the philharmonic patrons, the editor wrote in the January 7 issue:

We are happy to announce that our information given last week as to the treat promised by the Philharmonics in the rendition of Schiller's Great Tragedy of The Robbers is positively [sic] to come off on next Monday Eve., the 10th inst.

There was no review; in fact, nothing more is known of community theatrical activity until early in 1877. Sometime during the interim Mr. Gerspach, a Monroe business man, equipped the upper story of his business house as a public hall. During 1877 performances by both professional companies and local groups were frequent.

¹⁴ Ibid., September 3, 1875.

On February 13 Grace Church sponsored a music program and supper at Gerspach's Opera House. Harpists from Vicksburg appeared on the program, and a ball followed the performance. Helen D'Este and her dramatic troupe began a ten day engagement on March 19. The company was well received by theater-goers in Monroe, and Helen D'Este contributed one half of the receipts of the final performance on March 29 to the Executive Committee of the Democratic party in support of the current state elections. During the first week of April, amateur groups in Monroe gave three benefit performances for the Executive Committee's campaign fund. On April 4 and 5 the plays included Woodcock's Little Game, A Kiss in the Dark, and The Coming Women. The first two were farces which had been given by non-professional groups earlier. The last was new in Monroe and was added to the musical program on April 6. Admission to each of the entertainments was one dollar, and total receipts amounted to "about five hundred dollars" which, according to the local weekly, was to be ". . . distributed among those who took care of our friends and their horses during the excitement in this parish preceding the late general election."¹⁵

The Female Academy presented Root's Floral Opera to a capacity audience at the opera house on June 26, after which time amateur activities were discontinued for an extended period. During September Gerspach added to the lighting equipment of the theater in preparation for a new professional season. Community groups were no doubt influenced by the increased number of traveling companies, and a year passed before Alice Steinau, a local student of the Cincinnati Conservatory

¹⁵ Ibid., April 13, 1877.

of Music, appeared in a public recital at the opera house on February 6, 1879. Two performances of the Jonathan Higginbotham Singin Skewl Class were popular events on April 16 and May 1. Participants included many prominent Monroe people who "kindly promised to assist the Professor's class. . . ." Managed by a professional director, the program included songs and comic dialogue burlesquing school situations during the previous century. General admission was seventy-five cents; reserved seats, one dollar; and children, fifty-cents. For the second performance, given for the benefit of the Monroe Masonic Lodge, general admission was fifty cents.

Community theater in Monroe at the end of the period gradually gave way to the rather infrequent engagements of touring professional companies. Leaders of the earlier Thespian Association, the minstrel organizations, and the Philharmonic Association were able to sustain their activities for only brief periods of time. After 1876 when Gerspach opened the Monroe Opera House non-professional theater practically disappeared.

Despite their frequent attempts to establish local theater groups during the period of Reconstruction, the people of Monroe and Lake Providence lacked the enthusiastic community interest and specific leadership which sustained lively theatrical organizations in other sections of Louisiana during the same time. Monroe's Thespian Society, formed in September, 1867, by fifteen young men and women, became inactive after the third performance. In 1869 the Monroe Literary Debating club failed to enlist a sufficient number of members to continue its meetings. Twice during the 1870's amateurs formed minstrel troupes, and present information indicates

that members were unsuccessful in sustaining their organizations after the first three or four programs. The Monroe Philharmonic Society in 1875 leased the Male Academy Hall and launched a proposed five-year program of activities. The organization dissolved within a year. The St. Matthew's Dramatic Society, directed by teachers at the Male Academy, conducted a series of performances during the 1874-1875 term, and citizens of Monroe patronized the entertainments regularly. Miscellaneous benefit programs sponsored by local church groups gained rewarding patronage. Thus it is evident that reasons other than a lack of community patronage contributed to the failure of local groups to continue their activities.

In Lake Providence amateur theatrical activity was similarly inconsistent. A debating society was active for a brief period in 1868; a music club was organized in 1869 but attracted little community-wide interest. During 1875, however, the volunteer firmen built a public hall, and a small but interested group of citizens led by J. M. Kennedy gave a series of dramatic performances which reflected both apt leadership and a wide interest among the people of the village. Firemen's Hall in Lake Providence and the Monroe Opera House, equipped by Gerspach in the upper story of his business establishment in 1876, provided adequate playhouses for touring professional companies. Although troupes visited the northeast Louisiana towns infrequently, the people soon developed an attitude of dependence which resulted in their discontinuing virtually all efforts to provide theatrical entertainment for themselves during the final years of the Reconstruction period.

Summary

When the Civil War ended in 1865 the people of Louisiana set about the serious business of rehabilitating community institutions which had gone practically unattended during the three years of occupation by the Federal military forces. Young men who had entered the Confederate army as inexperienced youths returned hardened veterans capable of assuming the responsibilities of establishing again in their home communities more stable economic, political, and social conditions. In rebuilding what had deteriorated during the war the people needed money, money which could accumulate only through community-wide contributions. Thus various local groups planned and produced public entertainments—fairs, parties, variety theatrical programs to benefit their projects.

Chief among these early community entertainments were programs of tableaux, charades, and vocal and instrumental music. They were programs which required large numbers of people to play, to manage, and to perform. They consistently attracted good audiences of citizens who wished both to contribute to worthwhile public enterprises and to find recreation and amusement for themselves. Gradually new interests in community theatrical entertainments developed. Cultural tastes unexercised during the war grew more discerning. Positive attitudes surmounted those created by oppression and defeat. New life welled up in the people. Proofs of this self-regeneration among communities in Louisiana are abundantly evinced in the flourishing community theatrical activity throughout the period of Reconstruction.

During the early years of the period young men and women in the various towns of Louisiana began forming well organized theatrical associations as capable individuals developed and assumed leadership. These amateur clubs were similar in organization. Elected staff officers included the association president and vice president, secretary, treasurer, business manager, stage manager and assistant stage manager. Occasionally the association property man, costumer, and prompter were elective offices. Scenic artists were usually individuals interested in the work and people with artistic ability. The organized theatrical clubs were of two classifications according to the scope and variety of their activities. First were those with comparatively small memberships. These restricted their activities to frequent productions of regular dramatic theater programs. Of the eleven such theatrical associations formed in Louisiana during the period five were strikingly successful: The Alexandria Thespian Association (1868-1870), the St. Francisville Edwin Forrest Dramatic Association (1876-1880), Thibodaux's The Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche (1874-1877), the Donaldsonville Silver Cornet Band Theatrical Association (1872-1877), and the Plaquemine Dramatic Association (c.1874-1877). Among these clubs only the Plaquemine association did not restrict membership to young men at the time of their organization. On the other hand, only the Alexandria Thespian Association failed to cast young women of the community in their plays during the period of activity. Consequently, it was necessary for certain of the young men to specialize in acting feminine roles. Each company had from two to four members who appeared consistently in women's roles.

The theatrical organizations of the second type were characterized chiefly by their varied activities. They gave fewer regular dramatic programs—about three or four each year—but broadened the scope of activities to include literary programs, debates, musical activities, and frequent parties and public balls. Memberships were larger; thus greater numbers participated in the various programs. Prominent organizations in this group were the St. Francisville Social Club of Feliciana (c.1866-1877) and the Pastime Dramatic Association (1877-1880); the Abbeville Literary Society and Dramatic Club (c.1875-1879); and the Opelousas Literary Society and Associated Thespian Corps (1868).

In forming their organizations theater groups proposed first to furnish theatrical entertainment for their own communities. Editors consistently pointed to the cultural and moral strength to be derived from the stage, and the people throughout the state attended the productions of their community theater associations in large numbers. A second general objective, achieved in degree with each succeeding performance, was that of providing for the cultural improvement and mutual amusement of the members of the theater groups; and a final general objective among many of the dramatic clubs was that of contributing financial support to community enterprises and to immediate needs of individuals or other groups in the respective communities and over the state.

In their programming theater groups varied. In Monroe, Alexandria, Opelousas, and Flaquemie the amateur associations usually included a long play and an afterpiece for each performance. Those in Donaldsonville, Thibodaux, and New Iberia scheduled

short plays, usually three one and two-act comedies and farces. French plays consistently appeared on programs in Donaldsonville and Thibodaux where the dramatic associations were organized into English and French producing groups. Interludes by the Association Orchestra and dances, comic songs, and dramatic readings by members of the organizations were regular features on the programs. Plays were the current standard light comedies, farces and melodramas playing in professional theaters throughout the country. Original short plays by members of the associations were presented occasionally. Dr. B. Claverie in Donaldsonville, Gus Brown in St. Francisville, and L. Francioni of Labadieville contributed original comedies. Ethiopian farces afforded opportunities for burlesquing the southern Negro in his emancipated condition, and original stump speeches and skits satirized the state and local Reconstruction government officials. Few of the dramatic associations had scenic artists. John Goulden, a commercial artist in Alexandria was official Designer for the Thespian Association; A. J. Trone, a Thibodaux teacher, and Simon Richard in Opelousas supplied the sets for many of their amateur productions. For their stages in other amateur theaters over the state associations bought periodically from professional houses in New Orleans, St. Louis, and New York standard sets of scenery including drop curtain and court, garden, and interior scenes in which succeeding performances were given. Amateur organizations made special costumes for particular productions; they accumulated wardrobes containing costumes for stock characters and including wigs and mustashes for makeup. Straight roles, however, were played in the dress supplied by the individual actors.

In every community there developed a numerous corps of actors. Repertoires of the amateur companies contained many more comedies than serious plays; consequently the various groups included a greater number of actors who achieved popularity as comedians than those who developed into capable straight actors. That many of the amateurs performed in production after production evinced their talents and their studious endeavors in cultivating them. Almost every dramatic association had one or more capable stage managers. Among the more prominent in their communities was A. J. Trone, O. Sullivan, R. R. McBride, and Thomas A. Badoaux in Thibodaux; Bernard Lemann and Dr. B. Claverie, Donaldsonville; John H. Shanks, Flaquemine; Julius Robertson, New Iberia; Gus Brown, Gus L. Friend, and T. A. Bakewell in St. Francisville; Simon Richard, Opelousas; and J. M. Kennedy, Lake Providence.

Theatrical entertainments were by no means restricted to organized dramatic club performances. Churches, schools, and volunteer fire companies sponsored frequent and often-times far more spectacular entertainments than the regular fare offered by theater groups. The community volunteer firemen's organizations probably contributed more toward providing outstanding community theater than any other type of civic or religious organization. During the Reconstruction period the firemen of Lake Providence, St. Francisville, Natchitoches, and Flaquemine built theaters in which both community and touring professional companies performed. The Natchitoches group organized and sponsored the community theater organization. Firemen in Flaquemine and Thibodaux frequently conducted elaborately planned fete champetres with activities continuing

for three or four days. Parades, occasional addresses, afternoon carnivals and band concerts, outdoor sports, and evening programs of regular drama and variety performances made up the events. Great numbers of local actors, musicians, and speakers participated in the various programs, and masses of town and surrounding parish populations attended them. Community church and school organizations sponsored less elaborate fairs and dramatic programs in which members of organized theater groups performed. Young men in Monroe, Alexandria, Thibodaux, Natchitoches, Franklin, and Opelousas organized minstrel troupes who presented lively variety entertainments for short periods of time. Juvenile dramatic clubs were formed in Opelousas and Plaquemine, and the Monroe Male Academy, Thibodaux College, and St. Charles College in Grand Coteau gave public dramatic programs, the first two schools maintaining active organized clubs for short periods of time during the 1870's.

Somewhat less theatrical but demanding great skill in management and performance were the grand tournaments and coronation balls given by organized tournament associations in Cheneyville, Alexandria, New Iberia, and Clinton during the 1870's. In imitation of the Medieval lists described by Sir Walter Scott, the Louisiana tournaments emphasized strict adherence to the rules of a pseudo-chivalry, demanding that the participants wear costumes appropriate to the lists, that they display expert skill with horse and lance, and that each successful knight be rewarded with the prize accorded his rank in the contest. At the coronation ball, held in the evening usually at the community theater or at a designated hotel ballroom, the

winning knight crowned the young lady of his choice to reign as Queen of Love and Beauty; the second, third, and fourth ranking knights crowned her maids of honor; and the grand costume ball proceeded.

During the Reconstruction period professional theater organizations came to the towns in every section of Louisiana where transportation facilities were adequate. Legitimate theater troupes visited Alexandria, Natchitoches, New Iberia, Plaquemine, Thibodaux, and Opelousas irregularly but with increasing frequency as the years passed. They performed in the same storehouse theaters, parish courthouses, and firemen's halls in which the local amateur associations performed. The better companies among them--the W. H. Crisp Company, the Ida Lewis Dramatic Company, the Helen D'Este Combination, and others--consistently played to good audiences. On the whole, however, professional theater influenced non-professional theater very little during the Reconstruction period. During the last years of the 1870's Monroe and Lake Providence in Northeast Louisiana, Alexandria in the Red River Area, and New Iberia on the Teche in the Bayou Country, showed a marked decline in the amount of amateur theatrical activity. Particularly in Northeast Louisiana, where amateur groups had been less successful in sustaining their community theatrical organizations throughout the period, the people developed an increasingly strong dependence on professional companies for their theatrical entertainment.

THE CLOSING DECADES

1880 - 1900

CHAPTER IX
THE FLORIDA PARISHES

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century amateur theatrical activity declined in importance in the Florida Parishes. The Edwin Forrest and Pastime Dramatic Associations of St. Francisville became inactive during 1880. No additional information was found concerning activities of amateur groups in Clinton and Tangipahoa after the close of the Reconstruction period. During the 1880's small groups of individuals attempted to form theater clubs in St. Francisville, Covington, and a number of smaller communities in the area. Some of the organizations were active for short periods of time. On the whole, however, community interest in amateur theater in the parishes east of the Mississippi River was less than it had been during the closing decade of the Reconstruction period.

The decline of community-wide interest in non-professional theater was probably due to a number of factors. The changing economic condition was doubtless significant. As early as 1878 an East Feliciana farmer expressed clearly the general economic prospect in a letter to the Clinton weekly.

Friend Lambert:—There is one fact which but few of us will admit, and that is that we are becoming poorer and poorer with the advent of every new year. Nevertheless, year after year have we been becoming poorer and poorer until bankruptcy absolutely stares us in the face.

One, and perhaps the chief cause of our poverty, is the low price of cotton. . . .¹

¹Patriot-Democrat, January 12, 1878.

Adapting to the stricter economy caused the people to spend more time working. They had less and less time to spend providing entertainments for the amusement and recreation of their communities. In the larger towns professional theater organisations visited with increasing regularity. Thus it was convenient, if not necessary, for many of the people to spend an evening at the theater for their entertainment rather than spend a much longer period of time rehearsing in preparation for a community production.

Covington

Covington, the parish seat of St. Tammany Parish, lies across Lake Pontchartrain to the north of New Orleans. For many years the town had been a popular summer resort for members of New Orleans residents. Of the amateur theater activity in Covington, nothing is known before the beginning of the St. Tammany Farmer in 1879. At that time the parish courthouse served the community as a public hall. Local musicians frequently arranged concerts; the young people conducted grand balls; occasionally, professional theatrical troupes occupied the courtroom for an evening.

On April 2, 1880, the Lynch Family, a professional group, performed a program of "singing, dancing, parlor scenes, laughable Ethiopian sketches, banjo playing and clog dancing." They repeated the performance on April 3.² A musical concert by Covington amateurs on July 20 netted the Catholic Church about \$120. On August 2, the Covington Fire Company No. 1 sponsored a Grand Fancy Dress Ball and "Promenade Concert," and the

²Covington St. Tammany Farmer, April 3, 1880.

professional Southern Minstrals closed a three-night engagement at the courthouse on August 13.³

Throughout the decade native entertainments were restricted to variety programs, although on three different occasions active efforts were made to establish an organization which proposed to present regular drama for community entertainment. In 1883, a benefit program at the courthouse included a farse called Scenes in a Pullman Palace Sleeping Car. The play was done acceptably on the courtroom stage; however, other numbers on the program proved more entertaining to the audience. Mr. Belden presented Quake Strong, a character sketch of an aged Negro preacher; A Christmas Carol was read by Mr. Hitch; and the local teacher, W. W. Dunbracco, gave The Yankee Courtship and The Old Man Helps Bashful Lovers.⁴

Encouraged by the success of the variety program, a number of the young men proposed forming a theatrical organization. They met on February 3 in the room of W. W. Dunbracco's night school above the store of W. C. Warren and Sen. J. D. Warren, M. S. Kottwitz, W. Evans, H. A. Morteo, William Brennan, and W. W. Dunbracco effected a temporary organization of what they termed the Covington Dramatic and Literary Society. Dunbracco and Brennan were elected president and secretary respectively of the new club, and the group began a movement to secure a theater in which to perform. In the April 10 issue of the Farmer appeared the first editorial plea for a public hall:

³Ibid., August 14, 1880.

⁴Ibid., February 3, 1883.

Covington needs a public hall. This fact becomes more apparent every time we have a public entertainment. We need a large hall, suitable for all purposes. It should have a stage and dressing rooms, and be fitted up for exhibitions, entertainments, balls, traveling shows, etc. The cost would not be much, and the rent would soon pay for it. We believe that such an enterprise would prove a popular one. Who will inaugurate the movement?

On June 12 J. D. Warren and H. A. Mortee, members of the Dramatic and Literary Club, with R. C. Abney and others began a series of variety entertainments for the benefit of the "Public Hall Fund." Twenty-seven people appeared on the first program. Receipts from ticket sales were \$39.40, from sale of refreshments, \$77.85. Cost of the production was \$52.25; thus the public hall building fund began with \$65.00.⁵ William C. Warren, president of the Covington High School, J. Cahier, a prominent merchant, and Wm. C. Morgan were made officers of a St. Tammany Hall Association, and in the name of the association Chas. Heints, J. R. Heamer, and J. Cahier planned a variety program of "comic sketches by the Covington Amateur Club" and a grand ball for September 13, 1883.⁶

For an extended period after 1883 the Covington weekly reported no community theatrical activity. The feverish campaign for a town hall failed to make available sufficient funds with which to contract for a building, and by 1887 individuals interested in producing plays fitted a small room with a stage, provided chairs, and announced the first program for the evening of January 27. Pellaot's Hall, as the devised playing place was called, was crowded on that first occasion. The stage was "neatly and artistically arranged, and afforded a good view from all parts of the house. The tableaux, charades, comedies, etc., were

⁵Ibid., June 16, 1883.

⁶Ibid., September 8, 1883.

presented in fine style. The members of the club were well up in their parts and evinced dramatical and musical talent of a high order." The Farmer observer, however, remarked of defective features of the production. The stage had insufficient light; the program should have had more vocal and instrumental music; and the time taken for changes between acts was entirely too long.⁷

The group who produced the variety program organized under the name of the Covington Dramatic Club. The production was planned for the benefit of the Methodist Parsonage, and fifteen cents was the price of admission. That the price of tickets was small was not unusual for theatrical productions in Covington. However, the great length and variety of the program reflected the eagerness of many to participate. That the program was too long showed further the poor judgment and lax management on the part of the directors in planning. The performance extended past one o'clock in the morning, and parts of the program were then omitted.

The program was repeated on February 1 for the benefit of the dramatic club. Admission was 10 cents. Patronage again was good, but the reviewer of the performance seized opportunity to renew his campaign for a public hall:

. . .The experience of the past two weeks has clearly demonstrated that we need a public hall, large enough to seat at least 500 persons; it should also have a large stage, with dressing rooms on each side. The long delays between the acts, last week, was owing to the fact that the ladies' dressing room was in a different building from the one in which the entertainment was given, and this, together with the inconvenient mode of passing to and fro, up and down step-ladders etc., rendered it impossible to make the changes more quickly. . . .

⁷Ibid., January 29, 1887.

We suggest, therefore, that a subscription list be started, and entertainments given, for the purpose of building a public hall. . . . We are willing to subscribe for that purpose, and in order to start the movement, we will head the list as follows:

ST. TAMMANY FARMER, \$5.00. . . .⁸

Late in 1888 a newly organized Dramatic Club took up the cause of the public hall. On August 2 a number of young men organized, electing as their president F. A. Guyol, a Covington attorney and real estate agent who was elected mayor the following year. W. F. Evans, stage manager of the Covington Dramatic Club the previous year, became stage manager for the new club. F. N. Jordan was made the musical director, and the membership consisted of some fourteen leaders of the town's social and business activities including the postmaster, Charles Heints, and the Farmer editor, W. G. Kentsel. As reported through the press the group organized "to afford entertainment to its members and occasionally to the public."⁹ The entertainments were of a semi-private nature and were not reported in the weekly Farmer. More important, probably, was the support afforded by the group to the movement to provide the town with a public hall. At least two programs were planned by the group in support of the building fund. In 1889 F. A. Guyol, president of the Dramatic Club, became mayor of Covington. W. H. Kentsel, secretary of the Dramatic Club, became a member of the Town Council, and at the August 6 meeting of the council a special committee reported having purchased "the lots on the corner of Boston and Kemper streets, in the name of the corporation of Covington, for the purpose of building a Town Hall." Wm. Brennan, a Covington architect, submitted a plan for the

⁸Ibid., February 5, 1887.

⁹Ibid., August 4, 1888.

building; and early in December the council appropriated \$500 to begin the work. G. C. Alexis, Alf LeBlanc, and Jno. P. Malony, proprietors of nearby brickyards, each donated 2000 bricks to build foundation piers,¹⁰ and the council invited comparable donations from local lumbermen. On July 8, 1890, the council borrowed \$1000, at 8 per cent interest, to complete the structure, for which the mayor granted a mortgage on the Town Hall. A month later the council authorized a committee of its members, with Mayor Guyl, to perfect plans for an entertainment for the benefit of the Public Hall Fund. On Monday, August 25, 1890, the new hall was dedicated to the use of the public. Charles Stafford, a New Orleans attorney, was orator of the evening, and a miscellaneous program of music and dramatic readings, tableaux, and a comic dance was produced by local amateurs. J. W. E. Jones painted a drop curtain, a "mountain scene with rippling brook and twilight sky," and the main hall was tastefully decorated with "Japanese umbrellas and fans, Chinese lanterns, flowers and evergreens." The attendance was estimated at between five and six hundred people and receipts amounted to an estimated \$500.¹¹

The new hall auditorium was thirty-nine by fifty-five feet and had a seating capacity of "between 400 and 500." The stage was twenty by twenty feet and dressing rooms on each side measured ten by twenty feet. The ceiling was 14 feet high and the stage was elevated three and a half feet. The building, which contained lodge rooms on the second floor, had an over-all dimension of forty by eighty feet; and a decorative porch, six by twenty feet, protected the front entrance.¹² Later in September

¹⁰Ibid., December 7-14, 1889.

¹¹Ibid., August 30, 1890.

¹²Ibid., September 6, 1890.

notices that the Covington Town Hall was open for engagements were sent to professional troupes. In November the Mortimer Murdock Theatrical Company opened an engagement. Other professional companies visited Covington somewhat infrequently, and it was not until October, 1892, that another non-professional production was given.

Among the Breakers, produced on Monday, October 10, at Town Hall was the first regular drama produced in Covington by local actors. The production was for the benefit of a piano fund; the event was well attended; and the actors performed creditably. New names appeared in the cast. For example, Fritz Hemple and Robert Davis were young actors from the nearby community known as German Settlement. Max Edgar and Alense Strain were from Claiborne, two miles east of Covington; and Joseph Lancaster, from Madisonville, several miles south of Covington. Sam and Belle Peole, Ruby Warren, and Lydia Kantsel of Covington completed the cast. A few months later the Covington Band, directed by J. H. Schuy, sponsored a music and minstrel performance for the benefit of the same fund. The artistic feats of A. L. Williams, a commercial artist and portrait painter from New York who a short time earlier had opened his studio in Covington, received complimentary mention in the review. Williams prepared a "drapery etching" for the proscenium decoration and painted a "full size rustic scene covering the entire rear wall of the stage." He appeared on the program as portrait painter and delighted the audience with "lightning sketches" of Postmaster Chas. Heintz, Mayor F. B. Martindale, Jas. R. Hosmer, and J. E. Smith, Jr.¹³

During the last decade of the century two attempts were made to

¹³Ibid., February 4, 1893.

organize non-professional theater groups in Covington. Immediate cause of their failing to succeed appeared in the leadership. The Enterprise Band and Dramatic Comedy Company, the first of the groups, organized in March following the successful minstrel variety show given by the group the preceding month. Membership was composed of the Covington Band under J. H. Schuy and "a few gentlemen not members of the band, . . ." who were to "assist in presenting dramas, etc." Alva L. Williams was company president, stage director, and scenic artist. E. T. Moody was the business manager, Fred. Pechon had charge of properties, and J. H. Schuy was the musical director. The plans for their first entertainment on April 20, 1893, included a three part program: the first was minstrels, the second, variety--comic sketches and an olio--and the third part of "usual order," including vocal and instrumental music.

. . . With the active interest shown by the members of the company, the discipline observed by the officers, and the promise of new scenic effects, and careful stage presentation, this entertainment will doubtless prove a grand success in every respect.¹⁴

In a short paragraph report on April 22, the Farmer said that the performance was a success, that the audience which well filled the hall showed its appreciation by frequent applause. The band played well and the negro sketches by Lee Roberts, Harry A. Mortes, and Ernest Domergue, Jr. were humorous. Marcelin Hestrest, a talented pianist of Mandeville, Louisiana, was guest musician and performed with his "usual grace and ability." No further activity of the company was recorded.

The Covington Musical and Dramatic Club, the second organization

¹⁴Ibid., March 11, 1893.

of the decade, was begun in September, 1897. The director was Mrs. O. V. Richard, wife of a Covington clothing merchant and mother of six children. Regularly the club met and was entertained by its members; however, during its first year the group appeared in public performances on eight occasions. Their plays were serious, as a rule, typical examples being Down by the Sea, Comrades, and Hick'ry Farm.

Members of the club included such names as Kentzel, Strain, Smith, and Warren. They were people who had been members of previous theatrical groups. There were new names: O. S. M. Babington, R. J. Stroble, John Gale, Emma Whelpley, Josie Featherstone. J. L. Smith was the first president; Rebecca Weaver, Rosser Stroble, Ruby Warren, and Mrs. O. V. Richard were the other officers. S. M. Whelpley proved an efficient technical director for the group. At the January 26, 1898, production of Down by the Sea, the play opened with "two beautiful tableaux, representing the wrecks of the ships Gladiator and the Diana. The ships were seen rolling on the stormy waters of the ocean, and finally disappear beneath the waves."¹⁵ Down by the Sea was produced for the benefit of the Town Hall, and was repeated in Franklinton on February 18. Receipts from the performances netted sixty dollars, to which the Farm recommended

. . . The Town Council to add something to this amount and have the stage enlarged, erect new dressing rooms and add a green room, for the accommodation and comfort of performers. A full set of scenery and new curtain are also needed, and better lighting facilities.¹⁶

On April 23 the club performed Hick'ry Farm for the benefit of the Methodist Church; a farce, The Little Rebel, closed the variety

¹⁵Ibid., January 29, 1898.

¹⁶Ibid., February 12, 1898.

performance on June 25 for benefit of the Catholic Church. In this cast appeared three new names: Myra Richard, Miss A. Lafaye, and Jos. Lancaster. Two other benefit performances were given by the group: Everybody's Friend, a comedy-drama, on August 19, for the Episcopal Church, and Comrades on October 8, for the Public Library.

Covington's Town Hall was destroyed by a fire which swept through much of the little town on November 11, 1898;¹⁷ Mrs. Richard, the Music and Dramatic Club director, died on the following January 5.¹⁸ E. D. Kentzel, Julian H. Smith, and S. M. Whelpley on two occasions during the spring of 1899 made unsuccessful attempts to reorganize the dramatic club.¹⁹ Members of the Town Council, in an effort to replace the community center, advertised for bids from contractors to build a new Town Hall. All bids were rejected, however, and by motion of the council in session October 13, 1899, the \$2000 insurance money in the Town Hall fund was transferred to the city treasurer, to remain as a special fund.²⁰ At the end of the century, therefore, Covington had neither players nor a place to play.

St. Francisville

St. Francisville's two non-professional theater organizations which successfully provided a healthy recreation and entertainment for the community during the closing years of the period of Reconstruction fittingly ended their activities with the joint production of G. M. Baker's Above the Clouds on August 5, 1880. The Sentinel's columns

¹⁷Ibid., November 11, 1899.

¹⁸Ibid., January 7, 1899.

¹⁹Ibid., January 28, May 27, 1899.

²⁰Ibid., October 21, 1899.

through December contained no information concerning organizational difficulties encountered by the Elwin Forrest or the Pastime Dramatic Clubs. December 20 was the date on which the Jewish citizens planned a dramatic performance for the benefit of Toure Infirmary in New Orleans. Estelle Cohn, the prominent actress of both the non-professional clubs, was the director of the plays rehearsed for the occasion,²¹ but there was no indication that the performance was given under the auspices of either of the dramatic clubs.

The history of St. Francisville's theater during 1881 and 1882 is unknown, the files of the Sentinel during those years having been lost. Early in 1883 the story is resumed, however, with two organizations striving for survival. The first, the Pastime Literary and Social Club which sponsored a club hall and reading room, met on January 22 to reorganize and elect officers. Sufficient interest was not shown in the work of the club, unfortunately, and the remaining seven members held their final meeting on March 25.

. . . The members realized that sooner or later they must give up the scheme. This conclusion, however, was not reached without the humble acknowledgement that there does not exist in these two towns sufficient material to appreciate or sustain a literary society! There are also wanting those qualities which nourish the social features of any organization. This is sad but true, and with the fact staring them in the face the congregated remnant of a once flourishing Literary (?) Club wisely resolved to disband. The furniture and other property was equitably divided among the members, in a business like and satisfactory manner, and Monday's sun streamed calmly through the open windows upon a deserted Hall and threw its pale rays around the last vestiges of a neglected and now an Ex-Club.²²

²¹ Feliciana Sentinel, December 4, 18, 1880.

²²Ibid., March 31, 1883.

The second struggling organization, the Sans Souci Dramatic Club, met on September 10, reorganized, and survived to produce Henry Wilkins' Turn of the Tide for the benefit of the town sidewalk fund in late November. Among the members were Gus L. Friend, Jasper Sweetman, John G. Maguire, and Frank C. Beckel, formerly of the Elwin Forrests, and R. H. Haile, Theodore Bakewell, and Thomas Maguire of the Pastimes. These gentlemen, experienced in the work of non-professional theater, afforded a steady influence to a larger group of new but, for a time, enthusiastic group of amateurs. W. L. Stirling, Hunter and Robert Leake, John Irvine, George Baier, Ovid Leonard, Lee Schloss, Isaac Hawk, D. Jacobs, and R. B. Phillips were active members during 1883 and 1884. The club afforded its members an outlet for their music and dramatic talent, principally in the somewhat exclusive environ of the organization's select group. The benefit performance on November 26, 1883, was the only public production of which the record is preserved. Their group was active, nevertheless; and their card in the weekly paper indicated there were regular meetings on the second and fourth Monday evenings of each month.²³

At the reorganizational meeting of September 17, 1883, John Maguire succeeded A. H. Moses as president, and Gus L. Friend was elected stage manager. In October the president appointed a committee to "call upon the young ladies in town to secure their services for the female characters" in the plays proposed for the sidewalk benefit, a civic project assumed by the dramatic club. The group met with a number of handicaps. The young ladies had difficulty in arranging a suitable

²³Ibid., July 5, 1884.

rehearsal schedule.²⁴ The production was planned to be the first performance in Freyhan Hall, a new theater under construction; but the stage and stage equipment could not be installed in time.²⁵ Page's String Band of Baton Rouge, engaged to play during the program and for the ball scheduled to follow the plays, did not arrive. Consequently, the club, advanced the date for the production three days from November 23 to November 26, and the place was shifted from Freyhan's to Firemen's Hall.

The Sentinel review of December 1 indicated the performance was eminently successful, the large cast of experienced performers being led by Lee Schloss, John G. Maguire, and Julia Cohn. Gus Brown, as the schoolmaster in the farce Smart Scholars, had as his scholars Schloss, Bakevell, Jacobs, Baier, Maguire, and Stirling. The afterpiece thus "yielded an unlooked for amount of fun." Technically, the production was satisfactory: "We must not omit to say that the tasteful scenery and other accessories added much to the success of the plays, and that for once not even a cord refused to pull or a foot-light to burn. . . ."

Robert Leake became president of the San Souci Dramatic Club at the semi-annual election of officers in January, 1884, and Friend, the enterprising St. Francisville merchant, remained the club's stage manager. There was a continued interest of the club in the beautification of the town, and on occasion the group discussed additional benefits for the sidewalk fund. Except for their standing card announcing regular meetings, the Sentinel recorded none of the club's activities until August. On Wednesday, August 6, "a few of the faithful San Soucians" held a banquet

²⁴Ibid., October 13, 27, 1883.

²⁵Ibid., November 17, 1883.

at which time they discussed informally the subject of a public dramatic entertainment, "but no definite steps were taken."²⁶

Julius Freyhan, the builder of St. Francisville's new public hall at the foot of the hill, was owner and proprietor of the J. Freyhan & Company, wholesale and retail dealers located in upper St. Francisville. The enterprising citizen was eulogized in the Sentinel issue of July 12, 1884:

. . . By all means let us give our custom to home enterprise and in that way return some of the benefits which Messrs. J. Freyhan & Co., have bestowed upon our town, in giving employment to a large number of unemployed workmen, by beautifying the upper part of St. Francisville and by adding to the comfort and convenience of our citizens in the erection of their Public Hall and in laying handsome and commodious sidewalks. Such liberal and public-spirited benefactions deserve at our hands their recognition. . . .

Freyhan's Hall was completed and ready for "balls, theatres and other social gatherings" on December 8, 1883. The stage was described as spacious with large dressing rooms on either side. Scenery was arranged; and, according to the local editor, what St. Francisville wanted to see was "a good troupe playing behind the footlights." Within two weeks the Martin Golden Opera company opened an engagement in the new hall. In September Freyhan installed a set of "handsome and comfortable chairs" in the auditorium. Though the hall was readily rented to sponsors of local programs, the management catered successfully to the increasing number of traveling professional theatrical troupes.

The Knights of Pythias and the Women's Christian Temperance Union of St. Francisville sponsored most of the non-professional theater activity after Freyhan's Opera House was built. Productions were not as

²⁶Ibid., August 16, 1884.

often as in the days of the organized Forrester and Pastimes; moreover, programs were planned expressly for the financial benefit of a charity or a civic project. Still, it was the experienced Gus L. Friend, Wash Hands, Gus Brown, and Mrs. J. D. Austen who found for themselves opportunity to participate in community theater and who were more often the directors of the programs.

Bayou Sara Fire Company No. 1 sold Firemen's Hall to the Bayou Sara Lodge No. 15 of Knights of Pythias in April, 1884. The Pythians repaired and altered the building for a Castle Hall for Lodge No. 15, and an armory for the Felician Division No. 4. Alteration plans provided for a ball room and theatre which included a "gallery for colored people capable of seating fifty or sixty."²⁷ The Division 4 Pythians planned a production of Single Life, a three-act comedy, to be followed by a grand ball on December 5, 1884. Wash Hands, Knight Commander and former member of the Pastime Dramatic Club, was director. In the cast were Frances Moll, Julia Cohn, Jennie Whicher, Florence White, and Mrs. R. H. Haile. R. H. Haile, Jos. Wolf, and Gus Brown were experienced amateurs who appeared in the male roles.²⁸

On May 12, 1885, Gus Friend directed a variety program at Freyhan's Opera House for the benefit of Mrs. Wooleries, a blind lady of St. Francisville. Gus Brown was master of ceremonies, and a Comic Irish Sketch was prepared as the second of the four-part program. Admission was 35 cents, and the successful production netted \$39.10 for the beneficiary.²⁹ Grace Church sponsored Mrs. Jarley's wax figures exhibition as the first part of their benefit program at Pythian Hall on July

²⁷Ibid., January 3, 1885.

²⁸Ibid., November 15, 1884.

²⁹Ibid., May 9, 16, 1885.

17. Mrs. Jarley's troupe was professional, but her success came from her ability to find acceptance by groups sponsoring benefit programs in small communities. In this instance the act gained favorable comment, especially the closing scene in which "Mrs. Jarley artistically grouped her figures around the stage and set them all in motion. It was inimitable. The thunders of applause throughout the entire exhibition expressed the appreciation of the audience. . . ." Stereopticon views "both comic and serious," made up the second part of the program and The Old Folk's Concert closed the performance. "The costumes were so admirably designed, and so becoming, and the beautiful old songs so well rendered," the reviewer believed that part of the entertainment best.³⁰

On March 8 and 9, 1886, the Pythians sponsored programs by Homer D. Cope, a dramatic reader whose reputation as an entertainer was widely known.³¹ Following each of the recitals the Pythians conducted a grand masquerade ball. It was necessary for the Knights of Pythias to repair their building again during the late months of 1886, and though their friends urged them "to give. . . one of their recherche entertainments," available information indicates that the Cope appearance was the last public entertainment given in the hall. The Knights of Pythias built a new hall in 1895; it served both the professional and non-professional theater after that date. In the meantime amateur performances in St. Francisville were given at Freyhan's Opera House.

During 1887 St. Francisville non-professional theater activity resembled somewhat the more prolific years of The Forrests and The

³⁰Ibid., July 25, 1885.

³¹Ibid., February 27, 1886.

Pastimes. The Women's Christian Temperance Union chapter in St. Francisville began the series of productions with a children's operetta, Prince Puss in Boots, and T. T. Woodward's popular temperance melodrama The Social Glass at Freyhan's Opera House on February 18. Mrs. J. D. Austen directed the children, and Gus L. Friend directed the adult production. The program was thoroughly planned. Local musicians--Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Binning, Miss F. White, Miss Louisa Rettig, and Prof. C. Meier--furnished instrumental music; and a vocal quartet of Hannah Raynham, Mamie Briant, Mrs. J. D. Austen, and J. S. Sweetman opened the program with "Come Where the Lillies Bloom." Costumes by Mrs. Austen, used in the children's operetta, further distinguished the abilities of Mrs. Austen as an amateur theater leader. She appeared also as Nettie Nettleby in The Social Glass.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union, with the aid of the talented and experienced amateurs, produced Hazelwood's Waiting for the Verdict and a one-act musical sketch, Barney's Courtship, on June 29. On the following July 5, the group met at Gus Friend's and organized the Helping Hands Dramatic Association. Gus Brown was elected president; Gus L. Friend, Stage Manager; Mrs. J. D. Austen, Assistant Stage Manager; John Leake, Prompter; Thomas Muller, Scene Artist; and H. Town was designated as Prop. Holder. Other offices were filled by William Wiener, Guy Ellis, Ed. Temple, and J. S. Sweetman; and among the members were Leon Cohn, Frank Leake, Felix Gabriel, Henry Hirsch, and William Stirling.³²

³²Ibid., July 9, 1887.

The same cast repeated Waiting for the Verdict on July 15. The program was given for the benefit of the sidewalk fund. At their meeting on July 18, the association passed "a resolution by which the club expressed its determination to insist that the sale of intoxicating beverages, at entertainments for the benefit of which the club may in future play, shall be strictly prohibited." The editor's comment supported the resolution.³³

Productions of September 22 and October 22 concluded the record of the Helping Hands Dramatic Association. The group had good direction; they paid greater attention to the mechanics of production. Mrs. Austen was repeatedly commended for her work with costumes. The stage effects for the production of The Emigrant's Daughter in September were "splendid and added much to the attractiveness of the play." The use of many experienced actors in these plays doubtless made them the most polished amateur productions in St. Francisville.

The 1890's were not years that were conducive to non-professional theater in St. Francisville. Events recorded in the weekly papers indicate that there was a return to tableaux, charades, and programs made up principally of music. The young men at intervals attempted to establish minstrel troupes. These proved successful for benefit performances on infrequent occasions, but they were never able to sustain themselves for any extended time.

Mrs. F. F. Converse managed a tableaux program for the benefit of Grace Church at Freyhan's Opera House on July 29, 1891. The young men organized an orchestra in March, 1892, and soon thereafter a Musical

³³Ibid., July 23, 1887.

Club was formed by the young ladies. Their groups were active, but their activities were restricted to semi-private programs given in the homes of the various members.³⁴ On September 29 the club produced The Dress Rehearsal, an operetta with an all-girl cast, for the benefit of the organization. The production was under the direction of Eugenia and Eliska Steeking and Bettin Montgomery, leading musicians of the club. A second public appearance of the Musical Club occurred on April 11, 1893, in the production of another operetta The Fairy Interviewer for the benefit of the Catholic Church. There was a cast of some forty persons, and the "lively, stirring music, the tasteful costumes of the fairies combined to enhance the beauty and attractiveness of the operetta."³⁵

Baton Rouge's minstrel troupe appeared at the St. Francisville opera house on October 20, on invitation of the Levee Committee. The town's Negro citizens produced a "minstrel entertainment" for the benefit of the levee fund on November 5 at their Pythian Hall. William Dawson was chairman of the committee who arranged the program, and serving with him were August Butler, Henry Armand, A. D. Robbey, Matt Gilbert, H. Piper, Robert Richardson, Charles Dawson, J. G. Douglas, W. J. Irvine, and John Dawson. Whether the troupe had been regularly active in theatrical activities was not recorded. Admission to their Program was 15 cents for adults and 10 cents for children. The Levee committee published in the Feliciano Sentinel on November 12, 1892, the following:

THANKS.

John B. Dawson, Sec'y and Treas'r, Colored Minstrel Entertainment,
We acknowledge receipt of One Hundred and Twenty-seven dollars,
being the net proceeds of your entertainment given on the

³⁴The True Democrat, July 2, 1892.

³⁵Ibid., April 15, 1893.

evening of the 5th instant, for the benefit of the levee fund. . .
 F. M. Mumford, President Special Levee Committee.

After the minstrel variety program at Freyhan's Hall on April 26, 1894, for the benefit of the String Band, the young ladies and gentlemen organized the Bayou Sara Minstrel Company. J. R. Matthews was elected president, Sam Dreyfus became the permanent director and manager, and Abe Mann was chosen secretary and treasurer. The troupe visited New Rhodoe in Pointe Coupee Parish for a performance for the benefit of the Catholic Knights of America on May 28.

The new Pythian Hall in St. Francisville was completed in December, 1895, and the Minstrels, now become the Trilby Minstrel Troupe, gave the first performance there on the 27th. The program was made up of a variety of music and comic readings, and was produced for the benefit of a piano fund. In May the ladies of the Episcopal Church arranged a program in two parts for the benefit of the Rectory. Music, dramatic readings, and dances composed the first part of the program, and a two-act comedietta When Greek Meets Greek closed the program. On January 14, 1897, the Knights of Pythias produced an original burlesque, The Secret Order, which was successful financially and probably extremely amusing to the audience of some four hundred people who attended the performance. Jerebubble Picklebreaches, the Grand Mogul; Judy Flannigan, the Grand Recorder of Events; and O'Leary Spoonpendyke, the Grand Conductor, were popular personages in St. Francisville for an evening. R. Lofton, W. Michel, and J. W. Anglin were amateurs who for the moment produced enjoyable theater to their fellow-townsmen. It was a characteristic example of the occasional entertainment given in the smaller Louisiana communities at the close of the nineteenth century.

Miscellaneous Communities

During the closing decades of the nineteenth century active dramatic clubs in smaller communities, even in rural settlements, of the Florida Parishes were possibly the most vital theater groups in the area. These clubs have left as a record of their importance only occasional correspondents' reports to the weekly papers in the parish seat or other larger communities.

Abita Springs, a resort town a few miles east of Covington in St. Tammany Parish, is representative of the one-production villages. Hattie J. Maloney and Sydney I. Heinemann initiated plans for a dramatic program held at the Abita Springs Pavilion May 7, 1892. Marcelin Hestrest, the Mandeville pianist who appeared in Covington productions, appeared on the variety program which consisted of music, tableaux, dramatic readings, and a one-act play That Rascal Pat.³⁶

C. S. Stewart, who was the first elected president of the Amite City Dramatic Association in 1876, continued to lead the non-professional theater groups in Amite. In 1880 an association of amateurs was furnishing theater to the community. The Maniac Lover and That Rascal Pat were the plays for their August 4 performance. In the tragedy Mrs. L. Brooks as Julia, Sallie Wooldridge as Mary, May Jackson as the Dame "came fully up to their usual standard of proficiency." Stewart, Dameron, Lawhorn, Helmick, Castaing, and Womack were the young men who appeared in the casts. George Womack as the maniac lover, the reviewer thought, excelled his usual consistent acting. Charles Stewart, Jr., was lauded for his

³⁶St. Tammany Farmer, May 7-14, 1892.

work in the role of Pat in the farce.³⁷ One other production is recorded from Amite City. On August 14, 1888, Handy Andy, a comedy, was produced for the benefit of the fire bell fund. "Miss Carlon Sternberger acquitted herself in her usually finished style. Dr. G. S. Stewart and Mr. Stone received hearty applause, and the other performers shone in proportion to the importance of their characters."³⁸ Both reviews preserved of productions in Amite City refer to previous work done by the amateurs. Since 1876, when G. S. Stewart became the leader of the Amite City Dramatic Association, the town probably had non-professional theater at more or less regular seasons.

Two academies in Greensburg sponsored dramatic clubs during the 1890 decade. The Herrville Collegiate Institute Alumni Association prepared an annual production for commencement week. For example, Lady Audley's Secret was the play for June 13, 1892. The Black Sheep, for June 10, 1895; and Paddy the Piper, on December 17, 1897, were a part of the school's mid-winter exhibition. The Johnston Institute, affiliated with the Methodist Church, was founded in Greensburg in 1895. By the close of the century both of the academies sponsored dramatic clubs. Proceeds from their theater programs provided much of the school's financial support. In March, 1899, the Johnston Dramatic Troupe produced an adaptation of Ten Nights In a Bar Room. The spring production of the Herrville troupe was Brac, the Poor House Girl. The plays were successfully produced in Greensburg and each was taken to neighboring towns.³⁹

³⁷Amite City Independent, August 7, 1880.

³⁸Ibid., August 18, 1888.

In Hammond in 1894 Art Lee, Bert Dalby, L. Gue, W. H. Hendricks, and others interested in acting and producing entertainment for the community organized the Hammond Comedy and Specialty Company. Programs were given at City Hall, and the troupe successfully amused the audiences until early 1895 when repetitions of their specialties no longer entertained. In June the group organized the Hammond Dramatic Club. Its first production was planned for June 20, at which time the performance was given for the benefit of the Hammond Band.⁴⁰

The Jackson Fun and Improvement Club of Jackson, Louisiana, was a community literary club whose activities included play production. On March 17, 1882, the club gave a production of Hamarelda at the home of Mrs. John Scott Smith in Jackson, to which were invited members of the Union Literary Society of Centenary College. At the invitation of the college, the club presented the same play at the school on December 8.⁴¹

Too little is known of Ludwig A. Geissler, a resident of Liberty Community, located about six miles north of Covington in St. Tammany Parish. According to a few scattered notices which were published in the St. Tammany Farmer during the years 1888 to 1891, Geissler organized and directed the Liberty Educational Club and wrote most of the plays produced by the organization. Up and Down "in 4 acts and 7 tableaux, with songs, composed by Ludwig A. Geissler, . . ." was presented on September 15, 1888. It was the first of the Geissler plays produced by the Liberty Educational Club. The particular performance was given for

⁴⁰Hammond News, December 12-19, 1894; January 9, June 12, 1895.

⁴¹Capitolian-Advocate (Baton Rouge), March 17, December 16, 1882.

the benefit of the Liberty Settlement schoolhouse. Admission was twenty-five cents, and the production was attended by some two hundred people. The musical play was repeated on September 19, and again a "large audience" attended. The next Educational Club program, on October 9, consisted of three Geissler one-act comedies. The plays had large casts. That the small rural settlement could provide actors for such a program indicated that the Educational Club was a community-wide organization. By September 4, 1891, the date of the last production of which there is record, twenty amateurs had appeared in the nine Geissler plays that had been produced.

Geissler's plays were comedies. A number were given descriptive names which indicated that the writer gave an emphasis to theatrical effect. Tableaux were prominent. Casts were relatively large in the one-act plays, ranging from five in The Rehearsal, to ten with extras in The Yankee Peddler, which was written with three scenes. Advice Gratis, I Dink So, John Smith and Son, and Who is He? were titles chosen by Geissler; from their brevity and terse suggestiveness, one is led to believe the plays depended to great extent upon lively dialogue first, supported by an apt situation, second, for their effectiveness. The Gunther Family, The Morans, Mrs. Meyer, The Montgomerys, C. Schirm, F. Biery, F. Dutsch, H. Deepfer, R. Schreiber, Frank Mendow, A. Wallace, L. Cole, J. C. Freibert, and Vincent Ball were prominent among the Educational Club members.

At Lindsay, a farming community east of St. Francisville in West Feliciana Parish, "fully two hundred people gathered at the home of Mr. B. H. Farnell" on the evening of August 19, 1890, to witness a production of the melodrama All That Glitters Is Not Gold. The following week the

same cast produced the play at the Pythian Opera House in St. Francisville.⁴² Nothing more is known of the Lindsey actors; however, they, the Liberty Settlement Educational Club, and the Central Pleasure and Comedy Club of Madisonville, St. Tammany Parish were characteristic of the closing decade of the nineteenth century in eastern Louisiana.

Marked changes in the non-professional theater activities took place in communities of the Florida Parishes during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The decline in the price of cotton, the chief product of that section, affected the economy of the whole area. Greater industry in their vocations was requisite among the people generally. There was less time to spend in preparation and production of community entertainments. In adjusting to this changing economic condition, the people permitted a striking decline in the amount of amateur theater, and in the larger communities they grew increasingly dependent on touring professional theater companies for their amusement.

In St. Francisville and Covington amateur theatrical organizations had generally small memberships. The Sans Souci Dramatic Club (c. 1881-1884) and the Orchestra and Music Clubs (1892-1893) in St. Francisville, and the Covington Dramatic Club (1887-1888) purposed only to provide amusement for their members. Although they performed publicly on occasion, they planned a greater number of their entertainments for select groups. A number of organizations were formed to provide financial support to projects of local civic and religious organizations. Funds for benevolence or charity were no longer mentioned in stated

⁴²Louisiana Herald, August 5, 25, 1898.

objectives of dramatic clubs. Among this class of organizations in Covington were the Dramatic and Literary Club (1883), the Enterprise Band and Dramatic Comedy Company (1893), and the Covington Musical and Dramatic Club (1897-1898). In St. Francisville were the Helping Hands Dramatic Association (1887-1888), the Bayou Sara Minstrel Company, and the Colored Minstrel Troupe, formed and directed by William Dawson (1893). Officers of organized theater groups during the period were generally limited to the club president, the secretary-treasurer, and the stage manager. Two women became prominent as stage managers during the period: Mrs. J. D. Austen in St. Francisville and Mrs. O. V. Richard in Covington. Other successful directors were Gus L. Friend, Wash Hands, Sam Dreyfus, and Dawson in St. Francisville; and W. F. Evans and Alva L. Williams in Covington. The Knights of Pythias and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, organizations in St. Francisville, sponsored many of the amateur theater programs during the period. Their specific objective was that of raising funds to carry on the work of their groups.

Programming by all theater groups showed a gradual trend from the long play-afterpiece and the one-act-play programs which characterized the productions of Reconstruction amateur groups. During the 1890's programs were composed of a single full-evening play or a variety program of music, dramatic readings, and short skits. The short plays were those of an earlier period. Long plays were most frequently current standard melodramas. The St. Francisville Music Club produced two currently popular operettas. Amateurs in the Florida Parishes paid greater attention to the technical aspects of production throughout the closing period of the nineteenth century. Thomas Muller and Mrs. Austen in St. Francisville and J. W. B. Jones, Alva L. Williams, and B. W. Whelpley in

Covington were commended by local editors for the settings, costumes, and stage effects in their dramatic club productions.

Theater groups organized in many of the smaller towns and rural settlements of the Florida Parishes during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The most outstanding rural group, according to present information, was the Liberty Educational Club, organized in 1888 by Ludwig A. Geissler. Between 1888 and 1891 Geissler wrote and produced eight original short plays and one four-act musical comedy. The Educational Club and similar theatrical organizations in other small communities furnished financial support to schools, churches, and various other occasional civic enterprises.

In December, 1883, Julius Freyhan, a St. Francisville merchant, completed Freyhan's Opera House. For a number of years thereafter, touring professional theater companies played regularly during the fall and winter months. Covington's town council built the Covington Town Hall Theater in 1890, and that community also catered to frequent professional troupes. The necessity for greater industry because of changed economic conditions and the greater amount of legitimate theater that was available in communities were influencing factors causing marked changes in amateur theater in the Florida Parishes during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER X

THE RED RIVER AREA

Non-professional theater in communities of the Red River area between 1880 and 1900 was generally marked by frequent attempts to organize clubs but little or no success in sustaining an active group. More of the non-professional productions were motivated by religious and civic groups who needed funds and found in local theatricals a means of financing their projects. In Alexandria and Natchitoches traveling professional companies increased in numbers as facility in transportation improved. Colfax, Montgomery, Marksville, and other of the smaller towns in the area reported a much greater activity by their literary societies and amateur dramatic clubs than they had supported during the preceding period.

Alexandria

Between 1880 and 1889 there was little non-professional theatrical activity in Alexandria. The private and public schools' commencement exhibitions were usually given during June and July each year. A second type of production was that of groups of singers and actors joining their talents in a "concert" for some benevolent purpose. The professional theater offered more and better amusements to Alexandrians during this period than the community groups were able to give.

No effort has been made to survey the professional theater activity in the area in this study; however, the following description is characteristic of the occasional company which played in Alexandria during the 1880 decade.

THE OPERA

. . . The Star Alliance Opera Company. . . commenced their engagement at this place on Monday, the 9th inst., and on each night of the week, they were greeted with highly appreciative audiences which, numerically attested the excellence of the talent of the company. . . . Commencing with "Maritana," or "The Gypsy and the King," there was produced during the week, "Prima-Donna of a Night," "Chimes of Normandy," "The New East Lynne," "H.M.S. Pinafore," besides the usual after pieces. John Templeton, the senior, and leading male character of the Company, is a comedian of decided talent, and inimitable in his peculiar roles. Alice Vane possesses the rare merit of assuming any part with equal and decided effect. . . . Miss Fay Templeton, the Star of the troupe, possesses in an eminent degree all the requisites for the Stage. . . . Messrs. Harry Buckley, Seth M. Crane, W. M. Fuller, Sumner Silabee, Camillo Valencia, are actors of far more than average ability. . . .¹

The number of traveling companies to visit Alexandria increased as transportation facilities improved. In the August 17, 1887, issue of the Democrat a descriptive essay pointed out that Alexandria's transportation facilities included first the line of regular boats from New Orleans and St. Louis, next, a branch of the Huntington system "known as the Morgan Railroad," over which ran a daily train to and from New Orleans, and finally, the Texas and Pacific Railroad, connecting St. Louis, New Orleans, Western Texas, and California. When

¹ Louisiana Democrat, February 18, 1880. Fay Templeton first gained prominence on the New York stage in the role of Puck in Augustin Daly's revival of A Midsummer Night's Dream, which opened at the Grand Opera House on August 19, 1873. According to Odell, the ". . . 'Great Star Alliance,' comprising Fay Templeton, Alice Vane, 'Star of the South,' John Templeton &c . . ." opened an engagement at the Bowery Theater on June 21, 1875. The company was in Louisiana late in 1879, appearing at Gerspach's Opera House in Monroe on December 8 through 15. (Odell, Annals of the New York Stage, IX, 419, 572; Monroe Ouachita Telegraph, December 5, 12, 1879.)

A. Albert, Alexandria Opera House manager, announced on September 8, 1894, the list of theatrical troupes booked to that date for the 1894-1895 season, thirteen companies had contracted for engagements which ranged in length from single night's performances to a week's run.²

Dramatic performances by the schools usually consisted of the commencement exhibition on closing day at which time each pupil appeared on the platform to present his reading, his song, or to speak his lines in the dialogue or to play his musical instrument. Alexandria schools on a number of occasions engaged Exchange Hall, the town's theater, and staged well prepared theatrical programs. The Children of St. Francis Xavier's Catholic School performed well June 30, 1880, and drew favorable appraisal from the editor of the Democrat on July 7:

. . . The children of the school taught by the Sisters of Mercy in this Town, having arranged their programme and thoroughly learned their parts, gave an entertainment which, for the freshness and crispness of the subject matter and almost faultless execution of their several parts, proved to be a wide departure from the stereotyped school exhibition. . . .

In addition to their selected recitations and musical numbers, the directors included two children's plays on the program. Play of the Angels was a symbolic presentation of a patriotic theme. Costuming was effective. The Children of Today, constructed in a series of scenes, "had the advantage over ordinary plays of teaching a moral." Its closing scene presented the entire cast in a dance of the Virginia Reel. Much of the business in both plays was probably original.

² Alexandria Weekly Town Talk, September 8, 1894.

The commencement play the following year was a classic religious drama in five acts entitled Fabiola, or the Age of the Catacombs. The production was again given at Exchange Hall and the admission charge was fifty cents.³ On July 1, a week after the Catholic School play, the public school exhibition was presented at Exchange Hall. A. W. Pardee, superintendent of the public school, directed the program. Beginning with a tableau entitled Thanksgiving, the first of the two-part program presented in succession Box and Cox, a farce; an extravaganza called The Three Guesses; An Indian Raid, a comedy; Craquet, a burlesque; and a play entitled School Fellow. After the intermission The Gypsy Camp, a tableau popular throughout the area, was presented. The Quarrel Scene from The School for Scandal; an Irish play called Wearing of the Green; and the temperance drama, Tom Brown, the Drunkard, concluded the performance. James M. Hetherwick, the Alexandria merchant who made his non-professional debut in productions of the Minerva Literary Club in 1879, appeared as Sir Peter Teazle in the scene from Sheridan's comedy; and Superintendent Pardee took the role of Tom Brown, the Drunkard. Admission was only twenty-five cents. Despite the fact that Hetherwick and Pardee reportedly acquitted themselves handsomely before a packed house,⁴ the quality of the evening's performance must be judged below its quantity. The objective in planning the program remained that of presenting as many of the pupils as possible on the stage. In this instance, teacher was included.

³ Louisiana Democrat, June 22, 1881.

⁴ Ibid., July 6, 1881.

The benefit variety program, a second type of the infrequent non-professional productions given by Alexandrians during this period, consisted usually of a combination of music and drama. Performers were predominantly from that group of individuals who had had musical training and, in case of the actors, who had had some acting experience. Jack C. Goulden, the Alexandria commercial artist whose father was scenic artist for the Alexandria Thespians, continued to furnish new stage decorations for the productions. Originality was in evidence in certain of the programs, and as a whole these were probably entertainments of high quality.

A proposed fire department brass band was the beneficiary of a "concert" given on May 20, 1880. The music part of the program was high-lighted by the performance of tenor Grafton De Generees, a performer in the Minerva Literary Club programs the previous year. Pardee and Hetherwick performed in the farce entitled The Disappointed Showman, or The Unfortunate Tramp.⁵ Mrs. Canfield, a teacher in the public school, wrote The Fire Brigade, a reading dedicated to the fire company, and her daughter gave it during the performance. Young Miss Canfield portrayed the character of the Flower Queen in the two-night production of the operetta The Flower Queen on April 8 and 9, 1885. Professor Chase, the local music teacher, directed "upwards of 150 young ladies and Misses" in the production. Costumes, new scenery, and lighting effects gained prominent comments in the review by the Democrat of April 11. Goulden executed a wood and forest scene for the

⁵ Ibid., May 26, 1880.

production; the costumes contained the variety of color and design requisite for a parade of the flowers; and "a feature in itself was the brilliantly lighted hall, made so by the use of electric lights, furnished by Jacob Geiger."⁶

Two other benefit performances were reported during this period, first honoring Mrs. A. F. Grayson, a public school teacher, and the second adding to the public school fund. Three charades with exceptionally large casts made up the program for the Grayson benefit on June 27, 1887. When the Cat's Away, The Mice Will Play; Who's My Husband?; and Rifle Volunteers with casts of ten, eight, and thirteen, respectively, included the names of twenty-six young Alexandrians who had not previously appeared on the published programs. Four of these amateurs, Judith Cruikshank, Lena Haack, Charles Duke, and Andrew Cammack became active members of the dramatic club organized in 1893. The second program, planned for the benefit of the school funds, was

⁶ As early as 1881 electric lights were used in connection with theatrical performances in Louisiana. The Celfax Chronicle of February 19, 1881, reported a performance by a "steamboat 'opera troupe'" on February 14, at which time the "electric light exhibited was a treat to sight seers. . ." Although towns in Louisiana began early in the 1890 decade the installation of municipal lighting systems using electricity, this experiment of lighting a theatrical production at Exchange Hall in April, 1885, was the first example of its kind recorded in this study. Alexandria's city system was turned on for the first time ten years later, on April 2, 1895. (Weekly Town Talk, April 6, 1895.)

According to Glenn Hughes' The Story of the Theatre (New York: Samuel French, 1947) p. 233, the French Opera installed in 1880 and 1881 a complete system of incandescent lights--the first installation of such a system in any theatre. As a result of the demonstration of an electrically lighted theater at the Munich and Electro-Technical Exposition in 1882, the Savoy Theater, London, and the Bijou Theater, Boston, installed electric lighting systems, the first in their respective countries.

scheduled for Exchange Hall on April 19, 1888. Repairs under way at the hall forced postponement of the program consisting of "dramas, music, tableaux, etc.," until April 26.⁷ A. W. Pardee was the director of the program, assisted by Mrs. Grayson and Miss Woods, two other teachers. No report of the performance was published, and it may not have been produced until a later date since the hall was under extensive repairs, entailing both construction and decoration. J. C. Goulden was engaged by J. F. Airial, the proprietor of Exchange Hall, in February to paint new scenery and drop curtains for the stage. The March 31 issue of the Weekly Town Talk published the following description of the young artist's work:

The Editor of the TOWN TALK called this week on Mr. J. C. Goulden, who is busily engaged painting the scenery at the Exchange Opera House. Everything which has been completed by Mr. Goulden shows the artistic hand of an artist and exquisite taste. He has already completed a street, parlor, wood, prison and kitchen scene, and the drop curtain, besides a large number of side shift scenes of great merit. The outside drop curtain is a beautiful piece of work, painted to represent a wood scene framed. Surrounding it are spaces for advertisements and we noticed that Messrs. Julius Levin, H. M. Huie, Lund & Warren, Ferguson and Schnack, Leon Dessents, the Democrat and TOWN TALK have secured spaces. Mr. Goulden has a few more spaces to sell and the enterprising business men of Alexandria who have not already done so should apply at once and advertise themselves before all the spaces are occupied.

The very complete set of scenery and the decided business slant indicated by the outside curtain advertising space justify the conclusion that Exchange Hall was renovated for the professional theater trade. Soon thereafter an element of the citizenry expressed

⁷ Weekly Town Talk, April 7, 21, 1888; Louisiana Democrat, April 18, 1888.

the feeling that the ballroom of the local hotel was not a place sufficiently accommodating to serve as a theater for a rapidly growing town like Alexandria. These civic-minded people wanted an opera house. The Louisiana Democrat was the first of the weekly papers to use its editorial columns for the cause.

IN NEED OF AN OPERA HOUSE

We do not believe there is a man within our city limits who will not agree with us when we say that Alexandria is badly in need of an Opera House, such an one as is at Baton Rouge, Lake Charles and New Iberia—towns little if any larger than our's [sic] and not any more enterprising or farther advanced on the road of progress. . . . Of course we do not pretend to say that we need a building of this kind as gorgeous or as costly as Shreveport, or as large, for Shreveport's Opera House cost \$38,000, and is one of the most complete in the South. We do urge, however, that one to cost \$10,000, or more, would be in the proper line for us. . . . Every theatrical manager who comes in our midst wonders how we have for so long a term of years kept in the background and why we have not patterned after our smaller neighboring cities.

This is our first article on this subject—not our last. . . .⁸

Work began on the construction of the Alexandria Opera House on October 11, 1892, almost four years after the above article was published. Four business men of Alexandria undertook the enterprise; Julius Levin, a lumberman; A. Albert, a photographer; Thomas Clements; and T. E. Tauzin, who became manager of the theater. The building was located at the corner of Fourth and DeSoto Streets, fronting Fourth Street; it was 106 feet long, 50 feet wide, and had a twenty foot ceiling. J. D. Whitfield, the builder, contracted to have the theater

⁸ Louisiana Democrat, January 16, 1889.

ready for occupancy by November 8.⁹ On November 7--Monday, the first day of Fair Week in Alexandria--the Jennie Holman Company opened a week's engagement at the new Opera House.¹⁰

Soon after the opening of the new opera house interest was revived in the amateur theater. An Old Folks' Concert on April 14 and 24, 1893, afforded opportunity to all young Alexandrians who wished to display their talents. Large audiences attended the performances. The Alexandria Public Library, the beneficiary, netted \$253 from the two programs. The Old Folks' Concert was planned around the theme that customs of the past are incongruous with the present. The bold comedy is suggested by the names on the program: "Deacon Jonathan Puffenbach Higgins, Head Singer"; "Deliverance Spriggins, Pianerer"; "Mehitable Sparks Brown, (She that was a Higginbotham)"; and "Jane Maria Smithers, (who passed around the snuff)." Phil L. Asher, Rollo and Hunter Jarreau, J. P. Turregano, Judith Cruikshank, Laura Andrews, Roberta Hetherwick, and Andrew Cammack were prominent in the performance. Costumes were of the colonial period, knee pants, shoe buckles, and large powdered wigs forming identifying elements.¹¹

A few days after the last performance of the Old Folks, a movement began to organize a permanent dramatic club in Alexandria. Percy H. Levin, a professional actor, organized a temporary group, cast a

⁹ Weekly Town Talk, October 15, 1892.

¹⁰ Ibid., November 5, 1892.

¹¹ Ibid., April 29, 1893.

play, and proposed giving a benefit for the financial needs of the permanent organization.

Too little is known of Levin; for example, why he came to Alexandria, what specific work he had done on the professional stage, whether he went from Alexandria to other small towns to organize other dramatic clubs are facts which, if known, would explain in some degree how this Alexandria Dramatic Club of 1893 happened to acquire and follow certain trends which are very characteristic of smaller theater groups of the twentieth century. Percy H. Levin had no known connection with the Julius Levin of Alexandria, lumberman and stockholder in the Alexandria Opera House. All that was told about the man is contained in the following announcement from the April 29 issue of the Weekly Town Talk:

Mr. Percy H. Levin of New York arrived in our city Wednesday last and has organized a cast among the ladies and gentlemen for the presentation of Bartley Campbell's romantic comedy drama "My Partner," which will be presented at an early date.

Mr. Levin is a finished actor and a polished gentleman coming from one of the oldest families of St. Louis county, Missouri. His success on the stage in New York City and elsewhere has won for him the reputation of a magnificent actor. The proceeds of the performance will go to form a nucleus [sic] of The Alexandria Dramatic Club.

A Summer's Fancy, a "society comedy," was substituted for Campbell's popular play. Two weeks after Levin's arrival in Alexandria, the performance was given. Except for the visiting director who appeared in the role of Jack Henderson, the hero, the cast was made up of young men and women of Alexandria who had appeared in the Old Folks' Concert. As reviewed in the Weekly Town Talk of May 13:

. . . The first performance of the Alexandria Amateur Dramatic Club . . . took place on last Thursday night, at the Opera House. Every one of the ladies and gentlemen performed much better than was expected, in fact their acting was a surprise to every one. There were no hitches or bad breaks. Everything went smoothly, and indeed the rendition /sic/ of the play was much better than some of the professionals that have played to an Alexandria public. . . .

The play was repeated on the following night. Judith Cruikshank, Katie Beardman, Roberta Hetherwick, and Mary Keator were the young ladies who appeared in the production; J. P. Turreganno, M. H. Rogers, Graham Stafford, Hunter Jarreau, Harry Leckie, and Levin completed the cast.

The first production of the club without benefit of outside leadership was an old favorite in Alexandria, The Skeleton Witness, presented on October 9 and 20. J. P. Terregano was the manager and J. C. Goulden was the scenic artist of the Alexandria Amateur Dramatic Club, as it began a series of extremely irregular productions. During the following years the club performed under the leadership of Terregano, Phil L. Asher, and Hunter Jarreau. There was a large membership. Twenty-five young men appeared in the different casts, and seventeen young ladies; each new play included new names among the performers. However, the club seemed to lack a clearly understood objective, or purpose for its existence. The October productions, for example, were given to a project to beautify the city square. There was a church benefit early in 1894. At the election of officers on May 14, 1894, the club resolved to perform for "the benefit of charitable purposes." Three years passed before another production was reported by the weekly. There were possibly a few performances which were not reviewed. The "grand paper carnival" sponsored by St. James' Church and advertised

for November 7 and 8, gained no comments. "A first-class minstrel show" by 25 young men of Alexandria for the benefit of the Public Library, announced for December 15, 1894, for "the near future" was given no further mention in the weekly paper. The amateur club in announcing the forthcoming production of Jane, scheduled for February 23, 1897, indicated that "members of the Club were very much dissatisfied with their last performance."¹² The comment assuredly referred to a performance more recent than that of May 4, 1894, the last one reviewed by the Weekly Town Talk.

Significantly, the Alexandria Amateur Dramatic Club presented no afterpieces. The programs consisted of a regular play with interludes of comic songs and dance numbers between the acts. Plays were melodramas, which were currently popular--Above the Clouds, A Noble Outcast, Border Land. Jane, the Froman play, was proudly publicized as a drama with a big reputation which "had a run of 300 nights in New York City during the year 1895."¹³

Although new names appeared in each succeeding cast, the actors who played in the Dramatic Club productions had had previous experience either in school plays or in benefit variety programs given during the years immediately preceding the formation of the club. Thomas Crawley appeared in one cast. The former Thespian manager and actor was mayor of Alexandria in 1893. He was cast as Mr. Moore, the Justice, in The Skeleton Witness, on October 9, 1893. Mayor Crawley had played the

¹² Ibid., February 13, 1897. Louisiana Democrat, February 17, 1897.

¹³ Weekly Town Talk, February 13, 1897.

lead, Will Watterly, in a production of the play on November 17, 1869, given at that time for his benefit as manager of the Thespian Association. It was planned that Crawley would again appear as Will Watterly with the Dramatic Club on November 20. The brief review announced that

. . . Mayor Crawley expected to play the part of "Will Watterly," but on account of disability could not attend. Mr. J. P. Terreganno very ably rendered "Will Watterly."¹⁴

On seeing the production of The Skeleton Witness on October 9, 1893, Jack Riley, the first stage manager of the Thespian Association, was inspired to announce that "there was some chance of the old members of the Alexandria Thespians getting together and giving a theatrical performance. . . ."¹⁵ There was no reference to either of the old amateurs again.

Besides those already named, young Alexandrians who formed the acting corps of the Dramatic Club were Simon Hyams, Charles Goldenberg, A. and Norman Kramer, Phil L. Asher, Charles Duke, George Waldrop, J. Rogers, E. A. Rachal, Rollo Jarreau, Andrew Cammack, James Andrews, O. N. O. Watts, Allen T. Hunter, Chas. M. Galvit, Joe Sackman, and Charles Dammann; the young ladies included Mary Irving, Lena Haack, Flora Lehman, Lessie Reagan, Flavilla (Villa) Rushing, Belle Thorp, Laura Andrews, Rose Cheney, Lizzie Ferguson, Carrie Ponder, Esther Rosenthal, Minnie Sackman, and Fannie Ogden.

In November, 1893, Levin and Taugin withdrew from Opera House

¹⁴ Ibid., November 25, 1893.

¹⁵ Ibid., October 28, 1893.

Company, Limited, and Clements and Albert became joint owners, each holding one-half of the entire stock. An intention of converting the Opera House into a hotel was voiced at the time. Theater in Alexandria during these years was not proving a profitable business. Editorially, the Weekly Town Talk called upon Alexandrians to support the opera house management during the 1893 season.

... Our people should endeavor to do everything in their power to make the Opera House a financial success, so that it will remain as it is. This place of amusement is of modern build, comfortably fitted inside, and should be made profitable to its owners by the citizens of Alexandria. If the building be converted to some other purpose there will be no chance of getting another in Alexandria soon. This being the case, patronize the theatrical performances given there, and when a good hall is needed for other purposes, rent and pay for it."¹⁶

Albert subsequently became sole manager of the Opera House. For five seasons the enterprise struggled along. Patronage of professional troupes was not large. The Dramatic Club performances were few, and they were inconsistent in quality. At the close of 1898 Clements and Albert closed the opera house and sold all the stage equipment and house fixtures to the St. James School at Third and Fulton Streets.¹⁷

Three months later C. M. Waters, an Alexandria real estate agent, proposed through the columns of the weekly Town Talk that interested citizens organize a "co-operative company, limited, for the purpose of building a modern opera house in Alexandria." The editor of the weekly continued the editorial campaign. In July no steps had been taken to form the "co-operative company," and the Town Talk editor

¹⁶ Ibid., November 18, 1893.

¹⁷ Ibid., January 7, 1899.

made another appeal to the "moneyed men." Alexandria, a town of 5000 inhabitants, he said, is sadly in need of a place of amusement.

. . . We need an opera house and can safely say that there is money in it if the right kind of a house is erected and a business man, who knows how to secure first-class attractions, takes hold of it. The old opera house, which is now a livery barn, was always crowded when the companies playing there were worthy of patronage. If some wide-awake man can induce our moneyed men to take stock in such an enterprise, it will prove to be a good paying investment. A house with a seating capacity of 1,000 could be erected and used not only for theatrical troupes, but for balls, or in fact any kind of amusement.¹⁸

In the meantime the young men who had been active in the Dramatic Club arranged to use St. James School as a theater. The auditorium had a seating capacity of about three hundred. The stage, partitioned from the main hall by sliding panels, was spacious. With the scenery and equipment purchased from the Clements and Albert opera house, the group encountered few problems in transforming the building into an adequate playing place.

Having organized during the closing week in April as the New Ideal Minstrels, this group of actors gave their initial performance on May 9. W. T. Oberst directed the production. Norman Kramer was Interlocutor, and the End Men were Diderich Sackman, Hunter Jarreau, Joe Sackman, and Ben Schmalinski. Among the specialties were the "sentimental singers"—E. S. Wilson, Charles M. Calvit, Harry Fellows, and R. C. Jarreau. Other members of the company were John H. Overton, later United States Senator from Louisiana, Richard Armstrong, J. E. Dugger, W. Kay, Leon Watkins, James Andrews, and the Ferguson Brothers--

¹⁸ Ibid., July 22, 1899.

Willie, Casson, and Mortimer. Some three hundred and fifty people crowded into the school hall to see the amateur variety show. After paying production costs of \$70.65, the greatest portion of which was given Professor Oger and his string orchestra who played for rehearsals and the performance, the Minstrels netted \$106.70.¹⁹

Thus, at the close of the century the only organized non-professional theater group in Alexandria was an all-male company, like that group which began theatrical activities in the town about 1820 and that other group which renewed the activity soon after the Civil War. Unlike their predecessors, however, the Ideal Minstrels were not dependent upon their members to act feminine roles in regular drama. Young women had been active members of their theater organizations during the last quarter century.

Natchitoches

During the Reconstruction Period, it will be recalled, Natchitoches was unsuccessful on a number of occasions in establishing a sustaining non-professional theater organization. Their Firemen's Hall after 1874 served as theater for home production groups and for visiting professional companies. More frequently during the last two decades of the century professional companies visited Natchitoches as they toured between New Orleans, Natchez, Vicksburg, and Shreveport and the larger towns in Texas. It is further evident that non-professional theater became more successful in Natchitoches after 1880. Unfortunately, little is known of the activity.

¹⁹Ibid., May 13, 1899.

On August 16, 1881, Joseph H. Kile directed a group of young men and women of Hatchitoches in a program of three one-act plays for the benefit of the Fire Company. M. H. Carver, Jr., U. P. Breascale, P. P. Breascale, C. V. Porter, Zeffie M. Russell, Ida L. Jack, Nellie Hughes, and Violet A. Lachs made up the casts. Their plays, which "suited well the strength of the club and their powers of delineating characters, as non-professionals," were Money Makes the Man, Irresistibly Inevitable, and All's Fair in Love and War. In this program the players were successful in entertaining a crowded auditorium of their fellow townsmen at Firemen's Hall.²⁰

During the following week the group met and completed organization of their dramatic association. W. H. Tunnard became business manager. J. C. Moise was elected stage manager, and M. H. Carver, Jr. was made secretary and treasurer. The aim and purpose of the club, according to the local weekly's report on August 27, 1881, were ". . . to expend the funds received from their performances for the futherance of home enterprises, and to increase the local attractions of our little city." The company proposed withholding a portion of the proceeds from each performance as an organizational sinking fund with which to finance repairs to the old Firemen's Hall stage, to add new scenery, and to redecorate and beautify the hall generally.²¹

J. C. Moise, the stage manager, was delegated by the group to determine an appropriate name for the club. He proposed the name

²⁰ Hatchitoches Vindicator, August 20, 1881.

²¹ Ibid., August 27, 1881.

McGready. The members accepted the proposal, and the association became the McGready Dramatic Club. Shortly, the club received an order of new plays and their second production was planned as a benefit for Firemen's Hall. Moise put forth great effort to give programs of the dramatic club wide appeal. He enlisted well-known Natchitoches musicians to perform during intermissions. He inaugurated a "spelling bee" as a new feature. Further, he directed the plays and planned and executed new scenery for the productions. His initiative made him an apt manager for the new theater group. The added assistance of Kile in the acting corps and Tunnard as business manager gave the McGready Dramatic Club of Natchitoches a leadership that earlier groups in the community lacked.

On October 5, 1881, a joint committee representing the different fire companies of Natchitoches requested of the Natchitoches Town Council that Firemen's Hall, which had been partially financed and managed by the council, be returned to complete control of the fire companies. The council by appropriate ordinance relinquished its controlling powers. All volunteer fire organizations, under the name of the Natchitoches Fire Brigade, proposed to refurnish the hall and place it under the management of a business manager to handle all rental arrangements.²²

Between October, 1881, and August, 1894, the known record of the non-professional theater in Natchitoches is contained in three playbills of scattered dates, which are preserved in the Norbert

²²Ibid., October 8, 1881.

Babin Collection in the Louisiana State University Department of Archives. The earliest of the playbills is of a concert and variety music and dramatic program given on September 20, 1888.²³ Charles Beebe, a tenor of the French Opera of New Orleans, was featured in a three-part program given at the "Opera House." Twelve of the eighteen numbers on the program were music. The visiting singer appeared in four; Natchitoches amateur musicians provided the orchestra, chorus, and soloists in the remaining musical numbers. Miss A. Payne and Mr. I. Marcus enacted a comic scene entitled Mr. and Mrs. Sharp. A group of "sixteen young ladies" performed an "Oar Drill" and a tableau entitled Anaphasia. Joseph H. Kile of the McGready Dramatic Club, appeared in a "Grand Comic Scene."

Prices of admission to the program suggest, at least, that the 1888 "Opera House" was an elaborate theater.

ADMISSION:	Boxes,	\$1.25
	Reserved Seats	.75
	Gallery	.50
	Children under 12 years	.25

It seems likely that the new theater was none other than the renovated Firemen's Hall, though the years between 1881 and 1888 may have proved more prosperous ones for civic minded citizens in Natchitoches.

The two other playbills preserved in the Babin collection were commencement programs by the pupils of St. Mary's Academy of Natchitoches. The first, the program of June 28, 1892, records the casts of two one-act comedies, Paddy the Piper and A Slight Mistake.

²³Playbill. Norbert Babin Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

The second program was presented on June 28, 1894. The Academy pupils on this occasion presented a three-act drama called Mary Stewart, Queen of Scotland and a comedy entitled Humor of the Strike. No indication of the place the programs were given appeared on the playbills. The latter bill listed an admission price of twenty-five cents. Though the plays were open to the general public, they were probably presented in the school hall.

That Natchitoches enjoyed greater economic prosperity at the beginning of the 1890 decade is indicated by the writers of Memoirs of Louisiana in 1892.²⁴ A group organized an opera house company, presumably for the purpose of constructing a public hall.

. . . The Bank of Natchitoches was incorporated in July, 1890, and during the same year the Building and Loan Association. . . the Natchitoches Ice Company, . . . and the Natchitoches Opera House Company were organized, showing a remarkable business activity.

If an Opera House was built by this organization, it was destroyed by fire before June, 1895, at which time P. J. Gillen contracted to build a new courthouse, opera house, and Pythian Hall in Natchitoches. On August 9, 1895, the Natchitoches weekly, The Populist, reported:

The Opera House, Pythian Hall and Courthouse, all going up at once. Mr. Gillen has the contracts for the three, and intends to complete the first named before the 1st proximo. . . . One by one the lots in the burnt district are being occupied, and ere long all traces of the great fire will be obliterated.

²⁴Memoirs of Louisiana: Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1892, 2 Vols. II, p. 192.

The new Opera House opened with a week's engagement by the Curtiss Company, a traveling professional troupe, on October 14, 1895. The opera house was evidently a business undertaking; however, non-professional productions were presented in the theater during the remaining five years of the century.

Information concerning local theatrical activity contained in the Natchitoches Populist is extremely meager. The weekly began publication August 24, 1894. Not until May 24, 1895, did the first scant paragraph relating to the local dramatic club appear.

The Entertainment at the Comus Club tonight, promises to be a lively treat for our people. Mrs. N. H. Thompson, with a collection of our best local talent, will render Toney, the Convict, and we are expecting a complete success. Admission 25 and 50 cents.

In review the Populist a week later said the production was "a surprise and treat" to the patrons and admirers of the local amateurs. The May 30 issue of the Natchitoches Enterprise voiced a much greater enthusiasm, asserting that "the presentation of this thrilling drama last Friday was better than any by amateurs ever seen here and equaled the average company that visits this section."

Mrs. Thompson took her Amateur Dramatic Company to the Alexandria Opera House for a performance of Tony the Convict on June 18. The Alexandria Weekly Town Talk editor commented that "the young ladies and gentlemen performed pretty well for amateurs. Miss Gussie Nelkin, the leading lady, and Mr. C. E. Gréneaux, who took the prominent role, rendered their parts better than the average amateurs." Ben Dranguet, another active amateur performer in Natchitoches, was a member of the cast. His sudden illness after the Alexandria performance prevented

the company's playing a scheduled engagement at Littell's Opera House in Opelousas on the following evening.²⁵

Three other amateur productions were reported during the following four years. The play of the November 22, 1895, performance was not named, though the Populist reported that a large audience attended and that the production was good. Man and Master, a melodrama, was scheduled for February 12, 1897. This was a benefit performance for the Natchitoches Militia Company, and the local actors were to have the assistance of certain professional players.²⁶ The final non-professional performance was a production of Enoch Arden at the Opera House on February 18, 1898.²⁷

Schools continued to present public performances at intervals, especially at commencement time, during the last decade of the century. The Grammar School gave a variety program at the Opera House on December 6, 1895. Funds received for the performance were to be used to repair the school building. The program was directed by Leon Greneaux, a teacher, and students from the Louisiana Normal School assisted him. The price of admission is not known; however, the program netted \$53. The May 28, 1897, Commencement program by the Grammar School Classes included a pageant entitled A Trip Around the World. Leon Greneaux wrote the script in which were introduced "songs, dances, tableaux, a

²⁵St. Landry Clarion, June 22, 1895.

²⁶The Populist, February 12, 1897.

²⁷Ibid., February 18, 1898.

Japanese and an Amazon drill, Indians, Negroes, Gypsies, and Japanese in their national costumes."²⁸

Although available records are meagre, it is nevertheless evident that Natchitoches citizens sponsored active non-professional acting groups at intervals during the last twenty years of the century. During the early 1880's J. C. Meise led the group known as the McCready Dramatic Club; during the middle years of the 1890's Mrs. N. H. Thompson directed a similar group. The Comus Club, of which little is known, was a third organization that contributed to community development and entertainment. Contemporary with these independent groups, the private and public schools of Natchitoches served as a further outlet for theatrical expression.

Miscellaneous Communities

A larger number of small communities along the Red River territory submitted to the creative impulse to present plays during the last two decades of the century. The fuller record, though it is certainly not complete, is accountable in part by greater rural correspondence with the weeklies of larger communities and in part by a few of the smaller towns gaining publications of their own. Activities varied widely: the periodic school concerts and commencement exercises, occasional productions in plantation communities, dramatic clubs and minstrel groups.

In Arcadia, Bienville Parish, were located two schools, the

²⁸ Enterprise, May 27, June 3, 1897.

Arcadia Male and Female College and the E. A. Seminary. During the first weeks in June, 1889, each institution conducted a series of evening programs celebrating commencement.²⁹ The seminary opened its series of programs on Friday evening, May 31. Music and a debate were the activities. On Monday, June 3, music and expression pupils appeared in recitals, after which The Little Rebel, a one-act play, was performed. On the following evening a dramatization of the legend of the May Queen in four acts provided the evening's entertainment. As related in the Louisiana Advance review, the action of the legend began with the crowning of their May Day Queen by the children at their picnic. Immediately following the crowning ceremony an old Mother Gypsy stole into the group and enticed the May Queen away. Act two presented the gypsy camp at the time of the arrival of the Mother Gypsy with her prize. During the action the children's queen escaped from the camp into the forest. In Act Three the Fairies discover the lost May Queen in the forest, and the final act includes the restoration of the Queen to the children.

Commencement exercises at Arcadia Male and Female College began on June 7 and continued through June 13. The school was apparently attended by students from a wide area, since the Advance reported visitors from "other states and . . . this and other parishes in Louisiana." The opening evening concert was given to raise funds to defray expenses of the exercises. Events included both scholastic and entertainment exercises--Gymnastic drills, tableaux, dramatic skits, and music. One rather unusual device for creating good will

²⁹Arcadia Louisiana Advance. June 7, 14, 1889.

among the town folk of Arcadia toward the school was a "representation of every business house in Arcadia by 75 girls, each of whom carried a banner bearing the name of the firm she represented and recited a verse appropriate to the subject."

Though records of only the 1889 commencement programs of these schools are preserved, they were probably typical of their annual exercises.

A single play bill referring to the Blenville Amateur Theatrical Club is preserved in the Norbert Babin Papers.³⁰ The club gave at the "opera house on Rescue Plantation (Malrose P. O.)" a variety program of songs, tableaux, minstrel skits, and charades on April 7, 1893. Admission price for adults was 25 cents; children, 15 cents. Funds collected from the performance, according to the printed program, were to be given to the church and school.

On two occasions similar benefit performances were given by citizens of Boyce, Rapides Parish.³¹ The first performance was given on July 13, 1887, for the benefit of St. Phillips' church, and consisted of the operetta Fairy of the Fountain and a charade entitled Mad-Cap. The second program was announced for December 23, 1892, at which time the entertainment would consist of "theatricals, tableaux, and music, winding up with a grand dance and supper." The public school at Boyce was to be the beneficiary.

Citizens of Cheneyville presented their theatricals in private

³⁰ Norbert Babin Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

³¹ Louisiana Democrat, July 13, 1887; Alexandria Weekly Town Talk, December 3, 1892.

homes during 1893-1894. Contained in the column of a Cheneyville correspondent to the Alexandria Weekly Town Talk are the too few facts known of their improvised playing places. Of the production of the operetta Two Sisters on May 12, 1893, the correspondent reported:

. . . We entered the quondam opera house of Cheneyville, the upper part of Mr. D. Levy's residence, and found the audience watching the curtain, the footlights, and a row of graceful decorations. . . .³²

The performance was given to benefit the Catholic Church. Plays were announced for the evenings of December 25, 1893, and January 1, 1894, at the home of Mrs. M. Levy. These performances were for the benefit of the public school. Admission price was 25 cents, and supper was served for an added fee.³³ In the issue of January 6, however, the correspondent reported that the January 1 performance took place at the residence of Mrs. J. Levy. The four-act play called the "Marion Fay Drama" was played with Mattie Wall, Octavine Levy, Jeannette Blum, Sam Johnson, Hill Smith, and Wee Wee Wall in the cast. The entertainment netted \$60.65 for the Cheneyville high school. Mrs. D. Levy again provided theater room for a dramatic performance for the benefit of the Catholic Church on December 14, 1894. Granting the possibilities of inaccuracies in the reporting and printing, one wishes that this particular Cheneyville correspondent had written more fully of these intimate performances.

Early in 1899, Rena Phillips, a teacher in the public school at Cheneyville, organized the school girls into a minstrel troupe.

³²Weekly Town Talk, May 20, 1893.

³³Ibid., December 23, 30, 1893.

Their first program "portraying the plantation negro in his numerous fooleries, wit, wisdom and eccentricities" was presented at the high school building on February 10. The second was scheduled "after the Lent season" with an entire change of programme and scenery."³⁴

An all-girl minstrel troupe, residence productions of operettas and plays-- these indicate Cheneyville citizens had a lively sense of non-professional theater.

Non-professional theater in Colfax, Grant Parish, began before November, 1889. The Colfax Chronicle for November 16, announced: "Our young folks have another entertainment on tapis, and the casts of character in the plays are being made up now." Of the production nothing more is known. During 1881 the elder citizens of the town sponsored an active lyceum. John C. Wickliffe was secretary. Dr. W. C. Deal, R. S. Cameron, and Judge W. L. Richardson were contributors to the weekly programs which were given at the Parish Courthouse on Sunday afternoons.³⁵ Though Colfax had no adequate hall for touring professional companies, showboats of the Red River circuit occasionally moored at the little town for performances. Eiterially, the Chronicle revealingly characterized a particular steamboat organization in its February 19, 1881, issue:

Monday night a steamboat "opera troupe" gave an exhibition at Colfax, and amused old and young with song and dance, farce and joke. The word "opera" has a tony sound about it, but it would be far more appropriate for traveling minstrels to stick to their right names. The electric light exhibited was a treat to sight seers, nearly all of those present never having seen one before.

³⁴Ibid., February 18, 1899.

³⁵Colfax Chronicle, August 6, 13, September 24, 1881.

A group of young men organized the Colfax Dramatic Club in September, 1894. During the following February many of the same young men were instrumental in organizing the Colfax Literary Club. LeSage Hall, probably an unused commercial building, was fitted as a theater and the two groups, with mutual support, provided literary and theatrical entertainment during the following three years.

Among the organizational leaders in the Dramatic Club were John A. Williams, business manager and treasurer; W. L. Shackelford, stage manager; and O. N. O. Watts, a leading actor of the group who in 1893 had been an active member of the Alexandria Dramatic Club. Other members of the acting group were J. P. Kelsoe, William Lacroix, J. L. Hawkins, Matt Dunn, Charles H. Stuckey, Annie Forgan, a Miss Shackelford, and a Miss Williamson.

Performances were not frequent. They were consistently given for a civic or religious benefit. The first play was a rural melodrama entitled Uncle Josh, produced on September 14, 1894, for the benefit of the Colfax High School. A "good orchestra" provided interlude music and played for a Grand Ball which concluded the entertainment. General admission was fifty cents; children under twelve paid 25 cents; and patrons who wished reserved seats paid ten cents extra. Total receipts were \$59. The cost of the production was "nearly \$40." Thus the beneficiary received about twenty dollars.³⁶

Subsequent productions followed generally the same plan. The Danger Signal was given on May 24, 1895, for the benefit of the Catholic Church. Mary Teal and Annie Forgan, president and secretary

³⁶Ibid., September 22, 1894.

respectively of the Literary Club, managed the refreshment tables in this joint-organization production.³⁷ On October 17 the club again performed for the Catholic Church. The play was Under the Laurels, and a "grand sailors' ball" concluded the program.³⁸

During 1896 the Literary Club evidently usurped the available talent. Williams became president; Watts, vice-president. The group planned regular meetings, and assumed responsibility in collecting materials for a library as an organization project. Shackelford, Mrs. C. H. Teal, J. M. Dunn, Charles Ingram, Daniel Kelly, William Townsend, Cera Wells, and Miss L. Thomas were active members. S. M. Collins, principal of the high school, began active participation in the literary society and dramatic club in January, 1897. In June the Chronicle reported extensive improvement in LeSage hall, including new scenery by J. C. Goulden, the Alexandria commercial artist. This preparation was for the final dramatic club production recorded by the weekly before 1900. Tom, the Convict was the play, and the Catholic Church was again beneficiary. About one hundred persons attended the performance, according to the brief review. Old admission prices prevailed, and the Chronicle editor reported that "all parts were well sustained."³⁹

Dramatic activities at LeCompte, Rapides Parish, were sponsored by the school. Records of productions during 1893, as they were reported to the Alexandria Weekly Town Talk, showed that S. A. Myers,

³⁷Ibid., May 18, June 1, 1895.

³⁸Ibid., October 19, 1895.

³⁹Ibid., July 3, 1897.

teacher in the public school, directed the plays. A program of "declamations, recitations, and vocal music" late in February, was given for the benefit of the school. The Lecompte Amateur Dramatic Club furnished music, and a Professor Showalter, of Cheneyville, delivered an address. Thus it is evident that citizens of the community took active part in the dramatic entertainments. A "dramatic and musical" entertainment for the benefit of Wilmer Chapel was announced for Lecompte Hall on May 3, and a play LOUISE, the Pinner was advertised for performance on May 17.⁴⁰ The production was to raise funds to furnish the school house; it was to be given by "the people of Lecompte"; and the performance was to take place in the "Public Hall of Lecompte." If the community had an organized dramatic club, it was probably inactive at this time.

Two brief items contained in the weekly report of a Marksville correspondent to the Alexandria Weekly Town Talk of June 22 and July 6, 1889, furnish all that is known of the Marksville Dramatic Association. The first letter, dated June 16, states:

Marksville has a Dramatic Association, the principal members of which are Messrs. A. J. Lafargue, (of the Bulletin) T. T. Fields, A. J. Lemoine, and J. Lee Ducote. Messrs. Lafargue and Fields possess fine dramatic talent and as amateurs have already made their mark upon the stage. Their first performance this season will be in the latter part of July at which time they will play Social Glass and Toodles. . . .

The report written June 30 and published in the Weekly Town Talk on July 6, indicated that "several ladies of this place . . ." had "become members of the Marksville Dramatic Association. The organization will be permanent. . ."

⁴⁰ Alexandria Weekly Town Talk, May 13, 1893.

That the people of Montgomery, Grant Parish, carried on rather extensive dramatic activity during the last two decades of the century is noted in frequent editorial references in the Gulfax Chronicle during the period to their theatrical organizations. The Chronicle editor regularly acknowledged receipt of complimentary tickets to the Montgomery productions. It is probable that the dramatic organization had tickets and programs printed by the Chronicle and furnished the editor free tickets as an added courtesy for the work. Through the record of these acknowledgments it is possible to reconstruct partially at least the plans of the clubs. No commentary was made of the results of performances, either as to their financial or artistic achievement.

The earliest paragraph discovered appeared on August 13, 1881:

The Montgomery Variety Troupe are to give a select entertainment this evening, August 13, consisting of Charades, music, songs, tableaux, etc. The troupe is composed of the young ladies and gentlemen of Montgomery, among whom, we are told, there are some with considerable talent in the stage business. We acknowledge an invitation to be present, and regret not being able to attend the entertainment.

On October 8 the Variety Troupe planned a program to consist of charades entitled Proposal by Proxy, A Kiss in the Dark, and Big Mistake. Between the plays tableaux were planned.⁴¹ Acknowledging receipt of complimentary tickets for the June 10, 1882, program, the editor of the Chronicle referred to the group as the Montgomery Dramatic Club. In August, 1885, the group had become the Black Diamond Minstrels; and correspondent Alexis von Borg reported in her column in the Chronicle on July 9, 1887, that the young people had recently organized a dramatic

⁴¹ Gulfax Chronicle, October 1, 1881.

company which they officially named the Amateur Dramatic Association. The new names appearing periodically indicate that the activities of the Montgomery young people were seasonal probably, and that each succeeding organization assumed the name believed by their leaders to represent more precisely the type of programs planned by their individual groups. Under the leadership of C. C. Harris, principal of the newly established high school, Montgomery citizens organized a Literary Association in 1893.⁴² During the year programs consisted of a variety of literary and dramatic numbers. In December, 1894, the Black Diamond Minstrel Troupe was reactivated for programs during the holiday season. A single advertisement of the events scheduled December 25 stated that the price of admission was twenty-five cents.⁴³ The Populist of Hatchitoches, carried in its Montgomery correspondent's column on December 21, 1894, in addition to the minstrel program, a "Recital and Elocution entertainment on December 28th."

Except in Alexandria amateur theater groups in communities of the Red River Area maintained a lively activity during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Amateur productions had become infrequent in Alexandria after 1870. The Exchange Hotel Theater, formerly known as the Ice House Hall, under private management booked touring companies for engagements with increasing regularity during the 1880's. Community entertainments during that period consisted chiefly of variety programs and school plays, usually directed by A. W. Pardee, the public school superintendent. In 1892 Julius Levin, A. Albert, Thomas Clements, and

⁴² Ibid., May 11, 1893.

⁴³ Ibid., December 15, 1894.

T. E. Tauzin financed construction of the Alexandria Opera House. Under the management of Tauzin and Albert the theater catered more or less successfully to companies touring the professional circuits. In 1898 they sold the building and its theater equipment was transferred to the local St. James School Hall.

Between 1893 and 1897 the Alexandria Amateur Dramatic Club, an organization of distinctive characteristics for the time, was the only amateur group established during the period. Percy H. Levin, a professional actor, initiated the organization, directing the first productions in 1893. J. P. Terregano developed into a capable stage manager for the club and J. C. Goulden, son of John Goulden, was scenic artist. The Amateur Dramatic Club presented only a few programs each year, donating funds above production costs to civic projects in the community. The group produced full length plays, usually recent professional successes, with intra-act interludes of music and song and dance routines. For each new production the club evidently conducted community-wide tryouts. During the four years of activity seventeen women and twenty-five men appeared in the various casts. W. T. Oberat, Hunter and R. C. Jarreau, and others who had been prominent actors in the Amateur Dramatic Club organized the Alexandria New Ideal Minstrels and presented variety entertainments at the St. James School Hall during the closing years of the period.

Theatrical associations in other Red River Area communities conformed to the general features of amateur groups in other sections of the state during the period. Their officers were generally an association president, a stage manager, and secretary-treasurer. They performed

for their own amusement and for funds to contribute to the volunteer firemen, to the schools, and to the church groups in the community. The McCready Dramatic Club (1881) and the Comus Club (1895) at Natchitoches; the Bienville Amateur Theatrical Club (1893) at Melrose; the Colfax Dramatic Club (1894-1897), the Lecompte Amateur Dramatic Club; the Marks-ville Dramatic Association (1889); and the Montgomery Dramatic Club (1881-1884) and the Montgomery Literary Association (1893) were well organized groups for short periods. Their members were active in miscellaneous theatrical activities in the community after their club organizations became inactive. These late nineteenth century non-professional theater organizations performed less frequently than similar groups during the Reconstruction period. Their programs consisted of a single full evening play, particularly during the 1890's. Local newspaper comments concerning the technical aspects of productions indicated a generally increased emphasis on directing and stage scenery. Joseph H. Kille, J. C. Moise, and Mrs. N. H. Thompson at Natchitoches; W. L. Shaskellford, Colfax; Rena Phillips, Cheneyville; S. A. Myers, Lecompte; and C. C. Harris, Montgomery, were able stage managers for theater groups in their respective communities.

Smaller communities built no regular theaters. Dramatic clubs performed where they found a convenient place. Firemen's Hall continued to serve as the Natchitoches theater until P. J. Gillen constructed the Opera House in 1895. LeSage Hall, a converted storehouse, was the Colfax theater. Various residences were used for regular dramatic performances in Cheneyville until the public school was built. Only Alexandria and Natchitoches, the two larger communities easily accessible by boat and by rail, had a sufficient amount of professional theater to affect amateur activities.

CHAPTER XI

THE BAYOU COUNTRY

Community theater activity in communities of the south Louisiana Bayou Country continued through the decade of the 1880's much the same as it had during the preceding period. Generally, there was a marked increase in activity by dramatic clubs in the smaller towns and in rural communities throughout the closing decades. Plaquemine in the Lower Mississippi area, Thibodaux on Bayou Lafourche, and Opelousas in the upper Teche Country continued to be the centers of amateur productivity. To the weekly newspapers in these communities and others among the larger centers the rural correspondents provided the somewhat fragmentary records of theater activity in the smaller towns.

LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Plaquemine

During the closing years of the preceding period the Plaquemine Dramatic Association became inactive as an organization, though certain of its members, including John H. Shanks, its director, continued active in benefit entertainments sponsored by civic and religious groups in Plaquemine. Productions given between 1880 and 1885 were similarly sponsored; however, during these years new actors joined in the activities. Early in 1885 a group of these young people organized the Progressive Dramatic Association. During the following year Mrs. William Schlater began work with a group of children known as the Little Workers.

In 1885 Louis Barbay organized a minstrel troupe. These organizations as such were short lived, though their members continued to appear in various community sponsored entertainments. Late in 1886 Mr. and Mrs. T. B. Ellison, talented musicians, organized the Plaquemine Amateur Opera Company, which later became the Plaquemine Lotus Club. After 1888 organized non-professional theater in Plaquemine gave way to an increasing amount of professional theater during the winter months and the usual locally sponsored benefit performances during the summer months. In 1891 Charles P. Dupuy, a young postoffice employee, appeared in one of the benefit performances, grew in popularity as a comedian during succeeding years, and in 1896 formed a group of regular performers into the Plaquemine Amateur Dramatic Club which was active until the end of the period.

Groups who sponsored benefit fairs and theatrical performances during 1880, 1881, and 1882, managed activities through committees. Daytime events were held in the grove of the courthouse lawn. Evening performances were held in the small hall of the volunteer fire department building. In January an effort was made to organize a brass band. The movement was initiated by Alfred Schmidt, the resident music teacher. A committee composed of W. L. Roche, Louis Frank, J. M. Barker, and Eugene Marx planned a variety program to be held at Union Fire Company Hall on January 8. A concert, a marionette performance, and a grand ball made up the program advertised in the Iberville South on January 3. In the issue of April 10 appeared the plan for a three-day fair sponsored by the local Catholic church.

Grand Fête Champêtre for the benefit of St. John's Church, Plaquemine, La. On Thursday, the 15th, Friday, the 16th, and

Saturday, the 17th of April, 1880. Under the Pine Oaks of the Court House. Dramas each night by Amateurs. Music by Professor A. Schmidt and Band. Supper, Gumbo à la Greele. Fruits, Refreshments, Cakes, Ice-cream, Gipsy Tent, Post-Office, Lotteries, Contests, Tombola. Entrance to the Grounds Free. 50 cents to the Hall. Children half price. Dr. R. A. Kearny, president; Wm. L. Roche, Treasurer; A. Hunt Secretary.

Names of the performers and the titles of the plays were omitted from the brief review of the fair. Of the Thursday evening performance, which was poorly attended because of unfavorable weather conditions, the editor of the weekly paper stated that "those who braved the perils of the storm were well rewarded by witnessing a good performance." One month later, on June 16 and 17, the volunteer fire department sponsored a fair and dramatic benefit. John H. Shanks, former manager of the Flaquemine dramatic association, was chairman of the committee in charge of theater performances. Again comments on the events did not list the plays; however, this series was described as "one of the finest and most brilliant entertainments ever witnessed by this community," and the reported receipts from the fair amounted to \$600.20.¹

On December 9 and 11, 1880, Alfred Schmidt directed a group of his pupils in two performances of the operetta Golden Hair and the Three Bears. The acting of Tonie Schlater, Nellie Barrow, Lissie and Sallie Grass, and Masters Levy and Ruff was commended. The Chorus of Forest Children included Nannie Schlater, Carrie Schwing, Mamie Matthews, Blanche Canessa, Rosina Kowalski, Tony Levy, Mamie Slack, Annie Matthews, and May Wilbert. The production not only "was chaste and very entertaining and highly appreciated by the vast crowd in attendance," but also was

¹Iberville South, June 26, 1880.

the first in a series of children's plays in Plaquemine which led to the organization of the Little Workers, a children's dramatic club, a few months later.

H. L. Seymour's professional troupe played a five-day engagement at Firemen's Hall the first week of May, 1881. Their plays--Ticket of Leave Man, Uncle Tom's Cabin, East Lynn, Hidden Hand, and Fanchon--were well done, according to the report in the Iberville South. The company played to full houses each night and were "highly appreciated, not only for their dramatic talent, but for their unexceptional deportment and conduct off the stage."² The appearance of professional companies in Plaquemine grew increasingly more frequent during the years that followed. Though their record is not included in this survey, it will become evident that amateur activity continued, showing little influence of competition with the commercial theater.

On May 28 and 29 St. John's Church sponsored a fair. Minstrels and a concert of "vocal and instrumental" music were the featured evening performances at Firemen's Hall. Union Fire Company Number One published plans for an elaborate fair to be held on July 2 and 3.

Grand Fair to be given by Union Fire Co. No. 1, On Saturday and Sunday, July 2d and 3d, 1881. For the purpose of raising funds sufficient to enlarge their Hall. Drama, Comedy, Farce and Negro Minstrelsy. Music by a String Band and also a Fine Brass Band. Raffle of the grey mares Nellie and Kate, at One Dollar a Chance. Now to be seen at the Stables of J. A. Hebert. Raffle of a New Square Grand Piano. At Fifty Cents a Chance. The lady selling the largest number of tickets in this Raffle will be presented with a Fine Set of Ear-Rings and Breastpin. The lady selling the next highest number to receive a Fine Pair

² Ibid., May 14, 1881. The Seymour Troupe, appearing at Waverley Hall in Thibodaux during February, advertised the slavery play as Uncle Tom's Cabin As It Was. . . . a plain contradiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe. . . ." (Thibodaux Sentinel, February 5, 1881.)

of Rascals [sic].

Dancing on the Green. Refreshments of all kinds. All to take place at the Court House Grounds and Union Fire Co. Hall, Plaquemine, La.

Ladies who will keep tables at the fair will please notify the Committee of Arrangements immediately, and designate the kind of table they wish to keep. COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS: Chas. O. Lauve, Chairman. J. H. Shanks, L. Cheri, Adolphe LeBlanc, J. A. Hebert, Jules Dupont, Frank Haag, B. Tourres, Paul Labauve.³

Down By the Sea, a drama in two acts, was presented both evenings of the fair with Emile Girard, Henry A. Winfree, William Barker, Charles Petit, Paul Labauve, Henry Levy, Ophelia LeBlanc, Miss R. Lehman, and Miss L. L. Winfree in the cast.⁴ On February 1 and 2, 1882, Minerva and Pauline Dardenne and Elizabeth Hebert, assisted by Barker, Labauve, Petit, and Levy of the earlier cast, gave performances for the benefit of the Covent of St. Basil. The third annual firemen's benefit held on July 8 and 9 featured performances by the locally organized Bit 7 Minstrels. Their entertainments were

. . . all that could reasonably be expected of amateurs. Their songs, choruses and witticisms were received with great applause. "The Meeting of the Legislature" was first class, and not unlike scenes which have been witnessed in some of our Southern States. . . .⁵

Alfred Schmidt directed a benefit for the Episcopal Church on October 13 and 14. Selections from comic operas including Patience, Mascot, Olivette, and Billie Taylor were sung by "young ladies and gentlemen" of the community, and Professor Schmidt's orchestra contributed to the program.⁶

³Ibid., June 18, 1881.

⁴Ibid., July 9, 1881.

⁵Ibid., July 15, 1882.

⁶Ibid., October 21, 1882.

During the fall of 1882 Moise L. Levy led a move to organize a dramatic club in Plaquemine. In the January 6, 1883, issue of the South, it was announced that the organization under the name of The Progressive Dramatic Association was complete. Paul Labauve, who had been active in community theater during the preceding years, became manager of the new club. Moise L. Levy served as secretary, and Henry Levy was the treasurer. The group's stated aim was "mutual improvement and social enjoyment" of its members. The Progressive Dramatic Association gave six performances during 1883. The first play was Harold Hawk, or the Convict's Vengeance, a melodrama, and the afterpiece was Colored Justice. Proceeds from the performances, given on January 14 and 16, were to be donated by the club to a fund to purchase a city park. On April 20 the club repeated Harold Hawk at a benefit sponsored by St. John's church. A second group of local amateurs appearing in a single performance of Sea of Troubles on the same program suggested a friendly rivalry by naming their group the Enterprise Dramatic Club. On the following evening the Progressive Club presented Word of Honor. On May 12 and 13 the latter play was given again on the request of a local committee appointed to raise funds for the relief of tornado victims at Beauregard and Wesson, Mississippi. In October a new volunteer fire company, Hope Hook and Ladder Company Number 1, sponsored a fair to raise funds with which to build a new hall. The Progressive Dramatic Club presented The Two Bormycastles on October 13, and Dope on Both Sides on the following evening, both performances being for the firemen's benefit.

The membership of the Progressive Dramatic Club was not large. Paul Labauve, the manager, was the leading actor and Moise L. Levy, the secretary, was the group's chief comedian. Other names appearing in the

casts of productions during the year were Henry and Leon Levy, Harry Watson, and J. D. Mesritz; Isabella and Fanny Mesritz, Leontine and Rebecca Levy, and Ophelia LaBlanc. T. M. Grace, Jr., directed the single production of the Enterprise Dramatic Club. Appearing in the cast were William E. Barker, W. E. Bryan, Phil Postell, George Allain, Edwin Grass, P. McNamee, and D. E. Barrow, Jr. Little is known of the quality of the productions of the Progressive Dramatic Club. In a brief review of the April 20 performance of Harold Hawk, Paul Labauve as the "dissipated youth and village scamp Harold Hawk," was described as giving a good interpretation, of speaking his lines well, but of lacking action in his delivery. Isabella Mesritz "neatly personated" Jessie Gray, the sweet village maiden, and Ophelia LaBlanc did an "excellent piece of acting" in the part of Mrs. Gray.⁷ Of the club's first production the weekly reported that "the stage was handsomely decorated and everything done on the part of the managers to render the entertainment agreeable to those present."⁸ Attendance was good, a fact which may have resulted more from the publicity given by the sponsoring community groups than from the excellence of the club's performances.

In March, 1884, the new hall of Hope Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 was reported under construction. The structure, eighty feet long and fifty feet wide, was to have two stories, the upper level to be fitted for a public hall with a thirty-foot stage.⁹ In the meantime, community productions continued to be given at Union Fire Company Hall. On May 21 and 22 St. John's Church sponsored a fair and dramatic program in which

⁷Ibid., May 5, 1883.

⁸Ibid., January 20, 1883.

⁹Ibid., March 29, 1884.

members of both the Progressive and Enterprise clubs appeared. T. E. Grace, the Enterprise Dramatic Club director, was program manager. Two farces, The Drummer, or D'ya Know Me Now? and Pete and the Peddler, were presented; and a chorus performed between plays. On July 4 and 5 Plaquemine held a two-day fair to raise funds for repair of the river front levies. The first evening's performance was directed by Mrs. William Schlater and consisted in a charade in three scenes entitled Surprising, and a burlesque entitled Leap Year. A group of children known as The Little Workers made their first appearance as an acting group. Tableaux and a chorus completed the program. On the following evening the Progressive Dramatic Association appeared in a production of A Husband to Order with the last act of The Marble Heart serving as after-piece. New members of the group appearing for the first time in this production were F. L. Howell, Gus Chatry, a local teacher, Alexander Solomon, Katherine Watson, Leon Fass, Jr., and Mrs. F. L. Howell.¹⁰

In December the Little Workers appeared in their second public production. On December 12 the program was made up of The Oddity, a children's comedy in eight scenes, a charade entitled Mad-Cap, and a farce, The Tea Party. On the following evening the Little Workers repeated The Oddity, and added the farce Box and Cox. Music for the two programs was furnished by the Plaquemine String Band.¹¹

Hope Hook and Ladder Hall was used for performances by the Progressive Dramatic Association on January 3 and 4, 1885, the earliest reference found of entertainments being given in the new hall. On January

¹⁰ Ibid., July 12, 1884.

¹¹ Ibid., December 13, 1884.

3 the program consisted of Turning the Tables and Nigger Justice. Word of Honor, a popular play among the club's repertoire, was given on the following evening. On May 16 the Little Workers performed for the firemen's benefit at Union Fire Company Hall. Love at Sight, Masquerade, and Mistake were the plays. Misses Tomie Robertson and Ella Bryan directed and costumed the productions, and William Wilson renovated the faded Union Hall stage and scenery and painted two new sets for the production.¹² Again in May the fire companies sponsored a two-day fair and theatrical performance benefit. On the first evening, May 16, the Little Workers gave their final performance as an organized club. The Big Seven Minstrels, a group of young men who had given a minstrel performance in 1881, re-activated their company for a variety program on the following evening.

During the period of their activity the Little Workers introduced seventeen young people to Plaquemine audiences in the casts of plays: Nona and Mamie Schlater, Mamie Slack, Katie, Maggie, and Harry Watson, Walter Bryan, Jr., Carrie and Edward Schwing, Henrietta and Willie Desobry, Rufus Bruce, Logan Postell, Frances Shanks, Willie Erwin, and N. C. Roth. In an October 10 and 11 production of An Irish Engagement N. C. Roth and Frances Shanks graduated to the ranks of the adult performers of Plaquemine. In a review of the October 10 performance by a visiting spectator who was in Plaquemine on "urgent business" and remained to "take in" the dramatic performance, appeared individual evaluations of the actors:

. . . In due honor to sex and talent, I must first of all tender the laurels of the evening to Miss Frances Shanks. Miss Shanks as Norah was certainly the star, and a bright one. Miss Shanks had that self-control and perfect conception of the part she had undertaken, which are the first or principal constituents

¹²Ibid., December 13, 1884.

of a true actress, and I'll venture to say she has but few equals on the amateur stage. . . . Among the young gentlemen. . . W. L. Grace was quite praiseworthy, and elicited a great deal of well-merited applause from the audience. R. M. Dalavallade. . . made up in strong lungs and distinct articulation what he lacked in stature and rendered his part in quite a military manner. . . . McCarthy. . . by N. G. Roth, was neatly interpreted, though the young man displayed a slight amount of stage fright, which can only be done away with by appearing oftener before audiences. The part of Bullfinch was not suited to W. R. Bryan, who was, however, at home on the boards.

At the conclusion of the farce, the curtain rose on a very tastefully arranged tableau, "The Queen of the Hookers." Miss Mary Wilbert, as Her Majesty, looked royal dignity itself.

Hoping to enjoy another such treat at an early date, I am
Yours respectfully, MACBETH.¹³

December productions included A Widow Hunt on the 19th and Down By the Sea on the 20th for the benefit of the volunteer fire companies. George A. Coulon, a Plaquemine photographer, directed the first play. The stage was "set with handsome parlor furniture, carpeted, and lighted by a large chandelier. The cast included Thomas E. Grace, Frances Shanks, Pauline Dardenne, Coulon, and other members of Plaquemine's numerous acting corps. In the play of the following evening appeared only Paul Labauve and Henry and Moise Levy who had worked in the 1881 and 1883 productions of the piece. Herman Litz, G. H. Cretin, Julia Bisson, Domitille Dupuy, and Marceline Ellissalde were new, certain of them appearing on the stage for the first time.¹⁴

George Coulon directed the theatrical productions for a joint benefit fair for the two Plaquemine volunteer firemen's organizations on June 12 and 13, 1886. A program of tableaux and music by the local Amateur Orchestra made up the first evening's entertainment. Many of the tableaux were conventional in both subject and presentation. Rebekah at

¹³ Ibid., October 17, 1885.

¹⁴ Ibid., December 26, 1885.

the Well, Babies in the Wood, Love at Sight, and The Creole Mamma were among the first group of a two-part program. After the intermission a group of children were presented in a series of scenes entitled Venue Reaux, the American Sculptress, in Her Studio. The unusual arrangement and technical composition of the scene led the Iberville South reviewer to include a general description of what to him was "one of the most beautiful tableaux ever witnessed" in Plaquemine:

. . . The artist, with chisel and mallet, was at work, surrounded by the creations of her genius. The characters were so perfectly represented that many in the audience mistook them for marble instead of real flesh and blood. . . . Too much praise cannot be meted out to the heroism and endurance of the many sweet children engaged in this tableau, for they had to have face, head, arms, hands and feet plastered with a heavy coating of whiting, to give them the appearance of marble. They passed through the ordeal with great cheerfulness, some of them being under four years of age. . . .¹⁵

The production of Miriam's Crime, "a three-act emotional drama," on the following evening included in the cast Paul Labauve, Herman Litz, Henry and Aaron Levy, Marceline Elissalde, and Demitille Dupuy--many of the same people who worked in the plays given the previous December for the firemen's aid. Attendance was good at both performances, the latter, on a Sunday evening, reporting a \$97.70 total for admissions, approximately one-third more than the \$63.75 reported for the Saturday evening performance. No review of a program of three one-act plays scheduled for September 2, 1866, was found. However, the plays and complete casts were listed in the August 28 issue of the weekly: Calvin and Carrie Schwing, Logan and L. T. Postell, Anna L. and D. W. Barrow, Russell Bryan, Rufus Bruce, and Charles Desobry were to appear in The Day After the Fair.

¹⁵ Ibid., June 19, 1896.

Atchi, and Dandelion's Dodges for the benefit of the Episcopal Church building fund. Three additional members of the earlier juvenile club--Carrie Schwing, Logan Postell, and Rufus Bruce--made their debuts among adult performers in the series.

During the fall of 1886 a group of Plaquemine singers and actors formed the Plaquemine Amateur Opera Company under the leadership of T. B. Ellison¹⁶ to produce Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera The Mikado. The company performed at Hook and Ladder Hall in Plaquemine on December 29 and 30. On January 1 they appeared at Phoenix Hall in Donaldsonville, on January 7, at Pike's Hall in Baton Rouge, and returned for a third performance in Plaquemine on January 12. The Mikado cast was made up entirely of Plaquemine amateur singers and actors. Katie Watson, Anna Barrow, Sallie Kowalski, Pauline Dardianne, Dr. Laurens T. Postell, Gus Michelburger, B. Clark LeBlanc, Harry Watson, Aaron Levy, and Ellison. Mrs. Ellison played the piano accompaniment. Ellison designed and painted the sets; costumes were rented from Snell, a costumer at 47 Bourbon Street, New Orleans. Capacity audiences, according to the reviews printed in the Iberville South, attested to the excellence of the production.¹⁷

¹⁶Little is known of T. B. Ellison and his family. Apparently they were new in Plaquemine in 1886. Both Ellison and his wife were successful musicians, he as director and actor in the musical productions in Plaquemine and she as accompanist. Ellison was employed by one of the lumber companies of Plaquemine in 1887. During the time he was directing the Amateur Opera group he made numerous trips to New Orleans where he was apparently well known among non-professional music groups. In 1888 the family moved to Bessemer, Alabama, where Ellison was reported to have "embarked in the lumber brokerage and book and stationery business." (The Bessemer quoted in the Iberville South, March 3, 1888.)

¹⁷Iberville South, January 1, 8, 1887.

"THE MIKADO."

We have received the following statement of receipts and expenditures of money received at the several performances of the "Mikado," by the Plaquemine Amateur Opera Company, for which we are indebted to Mr. Benj. Deblieux, treasurer:

December—Two Nights—Dec. 29-30, 1886.			
RECEIPTS.			
Box office	\$306 30		
Other sources	7 25	\$313 55	
EXPENDITURES.			
Vocal scores & Libretto	15 58		
Printing	26 65		
Costumes	70 00		
Hall	20 00		
Hotel & moving pictures	10 70		
Stage settings	7 05		
Hall repairs	5 40		
Prof. Reinhardt	19 00		
Porter, services	3 00		
Stove, coal and oil	5 40		
Telegrams, etc.	1 72	100 70	
Gain			\$137 65

Donaldsonville—One Night—Dec. 31, 1886.			
RECEIPTS.			
Box	\$197 75		
Other sources	12 55	\$130 30	
EXPENDITURES.			
Railroad fares	28 70		
Hotel	55 00		
Hall	10 00		
Piano	12 50		
Printing	5 00		
Flunks for seats	9 68		
Prof. Reinhardt	5 00	105 85	
Gain			\$118 45

Baton Rouge—One Night—Jan. 7, 1887.			
RECEIPTS.			
Door	\$184 25		
Other sources	9 45	\$193 70	
EXPENDITURES.			
Railroad fares	20 00		
Hotel	25 65		
Costumes	25 00		
Printing	15 75		
Prof. Reinhardt	5 00		
Hall and usher	31 00		
Telegrams, etc.	3 75	152 15	
Gain			\$41 55

Plaquemine—One Night—Jan. 12, 1887.			
RECEIPTS.			
Door	\$61 75	\$61 75	
EXPENDITURES.			
Hall	10 00		
Piano	3 00		
Porter, services	2 50		
Printing	3 00	18 50	
Gain			\$43 25
Net gain			\$232 10
Total receipts	699 30		
Total expenses	467 20		
Profit	\$232 10		

DONATIONS.			
Lo-Lo	\$22 75		
St. Mary's Parochial School	22 75		
St. Joseph Church	106 60	\$252 10	

IBERVILLE SOUTH
Plaquemine, February 26, 1887

In its January 29 issue the Iberville South announced that The Pirates of Penzance was being readied for production in Plaquemine by "an entire new company." The success of the Amateur Opera Company had "created a worthy rivalry" among the young people of the town and others were "burning to distinguish themselves as amateurs." Although nothing further was written of this rival opera group, the same issue of the weekly newspaper reported that the play The People's Lawyer was in rehearsal for production the following week on February 5 and 7 for the benefit of the parochial school. On March 19 the Donaldsonville Minstrels appeared at Hope Hook and Ladder Hall for the firemen's benefit. Their performance, according to the brief comment printed following the appearance, elicited much applause, "particularly their local hits, in which 'the point was well taken'."¹⁸ In April the Ellison group began rehearsals of Chimes of Normandy. In the meantime, however, members of the Amateur Opera Company and other Plaquemine citizens interested in the general amusement and cultural development of the community organized the Plaquemine Lotus Club, "having for its objects mutual enjoyment, such as furnished by music, literature, chess, checkers, debates and the drama." T. B. Ellison was elected the club's first president and Dr. F. J. Kearny, a local druggist, was chosen secretary. A building adjacent to Kearny's drug store was secured for use of the club. The exterior of the building was painted, the rooms were papered, and furnished with appropriate furniture, pictures, and ornaments donated by members of the club. By April 23 the club reported a membership of more than one hundred persons.¹⁹

¹⁸
Ibid., March 26, 1887.

¹⁹
Ibid., April 9, 23, 1887.

According to plans Chimes of Normandy was scheduled for performances on Tuesday and Wednesday, June 28 and 29. The review appearing in the July 2 issue of the local paper began; "Wednesday night the hall of Hope Hook and Ladder Company was crowded. . . ." The writer concluded his brief comments promising "next week" to "speak on this subject again." In Varnado's survey of theatrical activities in Baton Rouge he reports that ". . . On June 30, 1887, the Lotus Club Amateurs of Plaquemine presented Chimes of Normandy at Pike's Hall."²⁰ No mention of the Baton Rouge performance was found in the Plaquemine weekly; however, according to previously stated intentions, the editor carried a second review of the operetta the following week, in the issue dated July 9. It began; "The second presentation Wednesday night of the Lotus Club Amateurs of Planquette's charming opera "The Chimes of Normandy" Assuming the accuracy of stated dates, this second Plaquemine performance was given on Wednesday, July 6. If the first performance was given according to the originally announced schedule, the club performed in Plaquemine Tuesday and Wednesday, June 28 and 29, and moved to Pike's Hall in Baton Rouge for a third consecutive evening's performance on Thursday, June 30. It seems more likely that the opening performance took place in Plaquemine as scheduled on June 28, that the troupe moved to Baton Rouge for the June 30 performance and returned to Plaquemine for a second performance there the following week on Wednesday, July 6. Accepting this schedule, one is aware that the "Wednesday" of the review published on July 2 is in error and should have read "Tuesday."

For the second opera production the Lotus Club provided a seven piece orchestra from its members. Julius Reinhardt, a local music teacher, rehearsed the orchestra and conducted the musicians during the performance.

²⁰ Varnado, A History of Theatrical Activity in Baton Rouge, p. 49.

Belle Fairchild, Ella Thibault, and Felix Cohen, members of New Orleans non-professional music groups, appeared in the Plaquemine productions. The reason for securing singers outside the Lotus Club members may have lain in the difficulty of the roles or it may have been because of the large cast required for Chimes of Normandy. The review indicated that Belle Fairchild was an experienced and versatile performer:

..... Outside of the natural claims the company had on the sympathy of our citizens, an attractive feature was added by the announcement that the charming Miss Belle Fairchild of New Orleans, would appear in the leading role. The curtain rose about 9:30 o'clock, and the company, arranged in different positions on the stage, presented a pretty picture as they sang the opening chorus. From that time on they held the attention of the audience as if by magic, and when the "star of the evening," Miss Belle Fairchild, made her appearance she was greeted with a round of most hearty and good-natured applause. She is a wee, winsome creature, very graceful, easy and captivating in her movements and actions, and we know of no name that would fit her better than that of a bewitching little sprite. She flitted and skipped about the stage as gracefully as a butterfly, and was just about as unsettled. She gives evidence of having had good training and much experience, as she is perfectly at home on the stage and never gets flustered or mixed up. Her acting is perfectly natural, her pose, emphasis, articulation and stage technique good, and her voice clear, resonant and pleasing. She is pretty well up in the actress' art in almost every particular and uses her large and lustrous eyes to good purpose. Her facial expressions are fine and generally well-timed. Taken altogether, and making allowance for the fact that the lady is only an amateur, her acting and singing are very creditable, and we have no hesitation in saying that she is bound to please any audience before which she may appear. She made a decided hit in the role of Berpolette, and we take great pleasure in adding our encomiums to the many already expressed. . .

Of Pauline Dardenne, the Lotus Club member who appeared as Katisha in The Mikado, the reviewer continued to say:

. . . Pauline Dardenne, as Germaine, went through her part in a way that must have been very satisfactory to her friends. Miss Dardenne is undoubtedly endowed with fine histrionic talent, and when she has appeared before the public often enough to do away with the nervousness and trepidation she manifested on this occasion, she will soon become an actress of pronounced merit. Her voice is sweet, sympathetic

and far-reaching, and only requires practice to make it what nature intended it to be, one of pathos and touching melody. . . .

T. B. Ellison, as John Grenicheux, "fairly surpassed himself, and his duets with Germaine were particularly good." Ellison and Pauline Dardenne were replaced by Felix Cohen and Ella Thibault in the second Plaquemine performance:

. . . The Germaine of Miss Ella Thibault, was a delightful agreeable surprise to the audience. It was Miss Thibault's first appearance with the club and though her reputation in amateur circles in New Orleans had preceded her, her capabilities were, until the performance, an unknown quality, the short notice on which she was invited from New Orleans, not admitting of more than one, and that an imperfect rehearsal. Of Mr. Felix Cohen's Jean Grenicheaux /sic/, too much in commendation cannot be said. Mr. Cohen's reading and singing is of a very high order of merit, while his acting in some of the very trying scenes was especially good. Mr. Cohen has made a reputation in New Orleans as a tenor in amateur circles and has resisted many opportunities offered professionally. . . .²¹

Many new names appeared in the Onimes of Normandy production: Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Pilcher, Walter Bryan, Dr. P. S. Postell, Sadie Wimberly, Mrs. Elodie Sculater, Fannie and Ida Dardenne, Hortense Kahn, Seppia Postell, Altha Reynolds, Mary Carraras, Benjamin and John Deblieux, Edward and Willie Grace, Charles and Willie Desobry, Rufus Bruce, and Celestin Roth. The orchestra musicians included Elet Hebert, Emile Pratolongo, J. E. LeBlanc, Aston Tourres, Herman Litz, J. A. Tulip, and Mrs. T. S. Ellison, who according to the July 2 review, "has been one of the moving spirits of the company since its organization. . . ."

A drama group appeared in "The Mother-in-Law and A Slippery Day at Union Hall for the benefit of Union Fire Company No. 1 and Plaquemine Steam Fire Company No. 1, on July 16. The plays did not go well because of in-

²¹iberville South, July 9, 1887.

sufficient rehearsal.²² The Lotus Club gave performances of Damon and Phythias on November 5 and 7 for the benefit of Hope Hook and Ladder Company. George Coulon, the photographer, directed the production. He designed and painted new scenery for the play and costumed it with rented period costumes. Coulon's acting in the role of Damon was praised in the review published in the November 12 issue of the Iberville South.

. . . The Damon of Mr. Coulon was as good and natural as any amateur could make it. In fact, had a stranger entered the hall and beheld the impressive and artistic acting of Mr. Coulon, it would have been difficult to make him believe that the actor was an amateur. His gestures, his looks, his oratory and carriage were all sufficiently exact to stamp him as a professional actor. . .

Dr. L. T. Postell, Harry Watson, A. A. Browne, Aaron Levy, Edgar Hebert, Pauline Dardenne, Mrs. Elodie Schlater, and T. B. Ellison appeared in the production. Soon after these performances T. B. Ellison moved his family to Alabama and the Lotus Club became inactive.

During the next ten years no effort was made to organize a theater group in Plaquemine. There were many experienced actors and a number of able directors among the citizens; moreover, productions were given with as great frequency and variety as before. Churches, schools, and the fire companies continued to finance their activities in great part by means of fairs. Almost without exception dramatic productions by the local amateurs formed a part of the entertainment at the fairs. Until 1890 both the older Union Fire Company No. 1 and the younger Hope Hook and Ladder Company continued to rent their halls for local and professional productions.

At Union Hall on December 15, 1887, the pupils of Mrs. M. A. Slack's private school appeared in a production of a children's operetta entitled The Little Gypsy: A second performance was given January 2, 1888, at which time Walter Bryan, Jr., did a burlesque of Mrs. Jarley's Wax Figures. The young man appeared in costume impersonating Mrs. Jarley manipulating impro-

vised wax figures. Mrs. Jarley and her repertoire of waxed statuary representing well known personalities from history and literature had been popularly acclaimed by audiences in many Louisiana communities during the period. St. John's Free School for Boys sponsored a fair during the week of April 9. A two-act comedy, The Little Treasure, and a farce, The Little Rebel, were performed on both evenings of the fair. J. A. Grace and W. R. Bryan managed the productions in which appeared several experienced amateurs including Frances Shanks, Lena Watson, Marceline Elissalde, and Emmett Brown. Proceeds netted for the school amounted to \$502.²³ A similar fair and dramatic program was directed by the Catholic Knights of America at Hope Hook and Ladder Hall on May 20 and 21, and netted \$600 for the same school. The Iberville Guards, local military unit, sponsored a benefit fair on August 28 and 29. Roll of the Drum, a three-act drama, and The Mikado in One Act, an original burlesque, made up the first evening's program. J. A. Grace and W. R. Bryan again headed the cast in the drama. Marceline Elissalde, Sallie and Rosina Kowalski, S. L. Postell, Willie Murphy, W. L. Grace, R. E. Brown, Henry Beraud and Fred Grace gave consistent performances. Sallie Kowalski, a member of the original Plaquemine Amateur Opera Company cast of The Mikado, directed the one-act burlesque production. The handling of the Gilbert and Sullivan script is suggested by the list of characters:

. . . Grover Mikado, dispenser of Federal patronage for Louisiana, Mr. W. L. Grace; Ko-Ko, a 5-cent tonsorial artist, Mr. Sam Skelly; Pooh-Bah, a Plaquemine aristocrat, Mr. S. L. Postell; Pish Tush, a noble lord, Mr. Kearny Grace; Katisha, a dime museum freak, Miss R. E. Bruce; Yum-Yum, Petti-Sing, and Peep-Boo, Three Little Maids from Straight University, Misses Murphy, Grace, and Brown; Tea-Box, a page, Mr. Gervais Skelly; Nancki-Pooh, a remnant of the Plaquemine Amateur Opera Company,

²³Ibid., April 14, 1888.

W. R. Bryan; Chorus--Messrs. Ed. Grace, Alfred Kaufman,
 Leon Levy, J. Bruce, C. Kleinpeter, P. Kleinpeter, W.
 Postell . . .²⁴

The one-act version of The Mikado was repeated on the following evening. George Coulon, the former director of Plaquemine amateur productions, sang a "Dutch character song" and the program closed with the presentation of the farce entitled Dentist's Clerk.

No record of non-professional theater activities in Plaquemine during 1889 is preserved. Early in 1890 Hope Hook and Ladder Company began work "to improve and beautify their hall so as to be able to accommodate any of the traveling companies" The stage was enlarged, the interior was redecorated and new scenery was purchased. After this time no further reference was made of entertainments held in Union Hall; however, the new St. John school hall was equipped with stage and scenery and frequently local productions were given there. In the February 15, 1890, issue of the Iberville South appeared reviews of recent productions for the benefit of St. John's School. Whether they were given at Hook and Ladder Hall or at St. John's Hall is not known. The first of the plays was the comic opera entitled Doctor of Alcantara. Lena Watson directed the production. Out in the Streets, directed by J. A. Grace, was the second production. Sam Skelly, Charles and Hugh Kleinpeter, Dr. F. D. Rice, Mrs. John Deblieux, Sallie Kowalski and Frances Shanks appeared in the musical production. "The costumes were elegant, and, taken as a whole, the play was as good as any of its kind ever produced here." In the drama Marceline Elissalde as the widow turned out in the streets, and Emmett Brown as Pete the "colored gentleman," high-lighted the production.

²⁴Ibid., September 1, 1888.

The performances and the accompanying booths at the benefit fair netted the school "about nine hundred dollars."

To meet costs of renovating their hall, Hope Hook and Ladder Company produced Border Land on May 7 and 8. A trio of children, Stella Marix, Maurice Ephraim, and Eddie Skelly, provided interlude music during the first evening's performance. An afterpiece, The Dutch Emigrant, was added following the feature performance the second evening. S. B. Fundenberg directed the plays and a number of new actors appeared in the casts. Sam Skelly, Rufus Bruce, Willie Murphy, and Emmett Brown, familiar from previous appearances, formed a dependable group with whom to introduce such less experienced performers as Morris Scharff, Gervais Skelly, Maggie Dupuy, Melia Skelly, Mamie Fundenberg, Gertrude Levy, and Alfred Kaufman. The usual admission of fifty cents was charged and the audience was large at both performances. The weekly reported unofficially on May 17 that the two-evening program netted \$221.60. On October 30 the firemen sponsored a production of T. W. Robertson's Caste "for the purpose of buying opera chairs."²⁵

Plaquemine's Lelia Symphony Band moved to purchase new instruments in December. Through committees the organization projected a fair with dramatic productions each evening. The general acting group that had worked in benefit performances for other organizations appeared in "The Woven Web", a drama based on Civil War material, and a comedy entitled The Flower of the Family, which were presented on December 30 and 31 respectively. Emmett Brown's reputation as a sympathetic impersonator of the Southern Negro continued to grow as he appeared as Uncle Toby

²⁵ Ibid., October 25, November 1, 1890.

in The Woven Web. Brown frequently played feminine roles, purely for comedy; he was equally successful on such occasions. A new actor, Charles P. Dupuy, appeared in the role of comedian in The Woven Web production. Commenting on individual performances in the review of the play, the editor wrote:

. . . Lack of space and time prevent us from speaking of the different characters separately and in a manner they deserve, and we will have to content ourselves with saying that each and every one did full justice to the role assumed. We will make one exception, however, as we think it no more than just that the talent displayed by our young friend, Charley Dupuy is worthy of special mention. This was his first appearance and the manner in which he acquitted himself was commendable in the highest degree. . . .²⁶

Non-professional theater activity during the following decade was less as the professional theater increased its activity in Plaquemine. Of the six performances by amateurs during 1891, three were given by the schools of the town. The Jewish congregation sponsored a festival on March 30, on which occasion a cast of thirteen children with an indeterminate number of extras appeared in a dramatization of the Bible story entitled The Finding of Moses. The festival was under the management of the Reverend D. Epstein, assisted by Laura Salomon, Hortense and Helvina Kahn, Eugenie Hirsch, Alphonse Kahn, and Simon Levy. The children's production was smooth and effective: "Every member was thoroughly up in his or her respective part, and no breaks or blunders were made, the lines being recited with precision and exactness. . . . It was, without exception, the best performance we have ever seen by juveniles. . . ." ²⁷ The comments on the excellence of the performance

²⁶Ibid., January 3, 1891.

²⁷Ibid., April 11, 1891.

were reminiscent of those reviewing the acting of the Little Workers some years earlier. A cast of Plaquemine amateurs led by Charles Kleinpeter and Emmett Brown presented two short plays, The Two Puddifoots and Antony and Cleopatra, Married and Settled, for the benefit of the Boys' Parochial Free School on April 11. On April 13 a program of tableaux was presented for the same benefit. Somewhat unusual was the fact that the entire series of tableaux treated a common subject, that of "portraying the life of Mary Stuart."²⁸ Commencement for the Boys' Parochial Free School held June 26 included among the activities a production of the play entitled A Test of Truth. The Convent of the same church presented Ladies' Regiment, a three-act play, and a French comedy, Les Sabots de Noël, on June 29. Both school programs were held at St. John's Hall. The pupils of the Convent were scheduled to present "a dramatic performance, representing the martyrdom of St. Cecelia and the heroic fidelity and self-sacrificing spirit of the Christians during the early centuries of Roman persecution" on the following September 25.²⁹

A three-day Grand Fête Champêtre and dramatic entertainment on July 9, 10, 11, 1892, was the single festival and amateur performance recorded during the year. The C. A. Brusle Brass Band sponsored the fair. The two-part variety program presented on the first night

²⁸Ibid., September 19, 1891.

²⁹Ibid., September 19, 1891.

consisted first of a "grand Operatio Burlesque, by the Peak Sisters."

. . . The Peak Sisters entered . . . attired in peaked aprons and bonnets, every color of the rainbow, being blended in with a taste that only ladies are capable of. At their head, was Miss Mary Dalzell, as Lucindy Minerva Peak, looking most charming in her costume. The Sisters arranged themselves in a semi-circle on the stage with their leader seated in the centre. Dixie Medley, and several pieces were beautifully rendered, these were followed by a recitation by Mrs. H. Whiteman, as Melindy Ann Peake, entitled "The Blacksmith's Story." . . . This was succeeded by the devoted Sisters, Aramanth, Abigail, and Jerusha Peak, respectively represented by Mrs. Elodie Schlater, Mrs. John Deblieux, and Miss Sallie Kowalski "The Milkmaid Drill" was the chief feature of the second part The young ladies were attired in white shirt waists, blue skirts and black belts, each carrying a milk stool. The Milkmaids divided in two companies, entered from opposite sides of the stage, and after marching and counter marching to music with the precision of a well trained military troupe, they faced the audience and went through a gun drill with their stools³⁰

The Donaldsonville Minstrels performed the second evening of the fair before an audience estimated to have been "without exception the largest ever seen in the Opera House." On July 11, the final day of the fete champetre, Plaquemine amateurs presented Imogene, or the Witch's Secret. Gross proceeds from the activities of the three-day festival amounted to \$1150.³¹

³⁰ Ibid., July 16, 1892.

³¹ Ibid.

In July, 1893, Sallie Kowalski and Beth Hall directed a two-performance production of the operetta, The Tyrolien Queen, for the relief of citizens of the Fourth and Fifth wards. The date of the first performance is not known, though the "second rendition" on July 11 "was a success in every sense of the word," netting \$125 for the company's charitable project.³² In January, 1894, the community projected a general fair for the benefit of the public school. A group of volunteer amateur performers presented the farce Wide Enough for Two; however, the chief entertainment features of the fair were a series of musical programs and dancing. Hope Hook and Ladder Company was the beneficiary of a general fair on October 13 and 14. A group of old and new actors, designated as the Plaquemine Booth-Barrett Combination, provided dramatic performances on both evenings. Gus Eichelberger, Robert Carlton, Sidney Robertson, Guy Hebert, A. G. Singletary, and others worked in the productions.³³

On November 14 an even larger group of Plaquemine actor-citizens gave a successful production of Sheridan's adaptation of Pizarro. The play was given for the benefit of the parochial school and was given in St. John's Hall. Period costumes, rented from a New Orleans costumer, were "appropriate and added much to the performance"; in addition, a special orchestra composed of Sallie Kowalski, Prof. Julius Reinhardt, Dr. F. J. Kearny, and Nat Knowlton, provided music. A. K. Grace and Clarence Hebert directed the play and managed the production. The cast included many of the actors who had been active in Plaquemine theater during earlier years. Dr. W. L. Grace, Clarence S. Hebert, W. L. Erwin, Dr. A. S. Robertson, H. J. Daigre, J. A. Grace, Victor Hebert,

³² Ibid., July 15, 1893.

³³ Ibid., October 20, 1894.

Morris Scharff, Thomas Booksh, C. Alban Barker, Robert E. Brown, Robert Carlton, R. W. Barker, Dr. J. H. Landry, S. T. Dupuy, and Henry Bohriam were included. A few months later, on May 26 and 27, 1895, approximately the same group appeared in productions of Strife and Comrades, two other serious plays. Paul Labauve, manager of the Progressive Dramatic Association in 1883, directed the productions, which were also for the benefit of the parochial school. In addition to those who had worked in Pizarro, these casts included T. Dubois, Mary Grace, Miss M. L. Geyris, and Miss M. Hebert. Attendance was good at the performances. Adult admissions were fifty cents, and the two programs netted \$643.50.³⁴

There was no further non-professional activity in Plaquemine until May 10, 1896, when the Bayou Goula Dramatic Club presented Dot, The Miner's Daughter at St. John's Hall to open a three-day parochial fair. The following evening the Plaquemine group presented Michael Earle, or The Maniac Lover. Charles P. Dupuy, Guy Hebert, Dr. J. H. Landry, H. J. Daigre, Angele Landry, Mary Grace and Mrs. Albert Calais acted in the play. The fair closed with a production of Lend Me Five Shillings on May 12 with Emmett Brown winning "round after round of applause" in the leading role. W. L. Erwin, Mrs. Calais, May Dardenne, and A. Munch, a new actor, supported in the cast. In reviewing these performances the Iberville South heartily supported the apparently adequate performers and suggested that the group organize for greater efforts.

. . . Plaquemine feels proud of her local talent, and a dramatic and literary club should be organized. There is certainly good material here and enough of it to make a success. . . .³⁵

The Michael Earle cast repeated their performance at Hope Hook and Ladder

³⁴ Ibid., June 1, 1895.

³⁵ Ibid., May 16, 1896.

Company Hall, which had been referred to as the Hope Opera House since its renovation in 1890. Because it was endangered by the caving banks of the river and Bayou Plaquemine, the opera house was moved from its original location some two hundred feet to the "head of Church Street" facing the bayou in November, 1896. During the spring of 1897 further encroachments upon the town by the Mississippi River and the work of a unit of United States Engineers, caused the fire company to purchase from A. Wilbert's Sons a vacant lot adjoining the Young American Saloon. The opera house was moved to the new location in March.

That the group of Plaquemine actors effected an organization is indicated by the advertisement of the fire company's benefit fair and dramatic entertainment scheduled for June 10, 1897.

. . . At 8 o'clock p.m. the Plaquemine Amateur Dramatic Club will present the Romantic Three-Act Drama, entitled The Courier of Lyons a play of thrilling interest, with all the original scenic and mechanical effects and splendid costumes prepared especially for this occasion. . . . ³⁶

The weekly newspaper reported that the performance "was very creditable." The club gave a performance of The Courier of Lyons at the White Castle Opera House on June 13. The audience was not large, but "numerous encores showed that the excellent performance was appreciated highly by those present."³⁷ In January, 1898, Charles Dupuy became manager of the Amateur Dramatic Club and F. E. Hubbard became manager of the opera house, representing the volunteer fire company. On January 2 and 3 the club gave performances of A Celebrated Case. Comments appearing following this appearance of the club seemed genuine, though no less complimentary of the

³⁶ Ibid., June 5, 1897.

³⁷ Ibid., June 19, 1897.

work of the troupe. Audiences filled the theater both evenings, "the receipts each night being more than the average traveling troupe brings to the box office." The reviewer continued his comments, lauding the actors for the smooth and polished manner in which the members played their parts. Concluding, the editor wrote:

. . . The Plaquemine Amateurs have an enviable name for their histrionic talent and the manner in which they have rendered some difficult plays, and this excellent reputation has been greatly increased by this last production. . . .³⁸

Little is known of later activities of the group. On February 20 the club presented A Celebrated Case at Phoenix Hall in Donaldsonville.

Miralda, The Cigar Girl of Havana was given at the opera house on May 22 for the benefit of the parochial school, and a production of M'Liese was scheduled for October.³⁹

From the period of mild competitive activity by the Progressive Dramatic Club and the Enterprize Dramatic Club during 1883 and 1884 through the more challenging musical productions of the Lotus Club in 1886 and 1887 and the regular festivals and fairs sponsored by the schools and fire companies during the first half of the 1890's, Plaquemine's non-professional theater was soundly motivated to continuous productivity. In these closing years of the century the managers had selected more difficult plays from the point of greater demands upon actors and more elaborate staging requirements. A closer organization was effected in the Plaquemine Amateur Dramatic Club under the joint management of Charles Dupuy of the acting corps and F. E. Hubbard, the opera house manager; moreover, this arrangement seemed to permit a greater feeling of stability than had been possible at any previous time.

³⁸ Ibid., January 8, 1898.

³⁹ Ibid., September 3, 1898.

Miscellaneous Communities

Information of non-professional activities in the communities surveyed here is not complete. Many of the small towns had no weekly newspapers; files of publications in others are lost or incomplete. Facts contained in the following intermittent chronology were collected from miscellaneous sources, and are recorded for their contribution to the total sum of this study.

In Bayou Goula, Iberville Parish, seven miles south of Plaquemine, the young men organized a dramatic association in 1877, as the editor of the Iberville South reported, in order "not to be outdone by the young folks of Plaquemine." At that time the organization used as theater a building called Buena Vista Hall. Their first program, planned for May 27, 1877, consisting "principally of Ethiopian Drama," was given for the benefit of Adam Melancon, a citizen of the town.⁴⁰ On February 16 and 17 the following year the club gave variety entertainments of "Negro Minstrels, Songs, Dances, etc.," for the benefit of St. Paul's Church. The name of the club was published variously as the Bayou Goula Relief Association, The Bayou Goula Relief Minstrels, and the Bayou Goula Amateur Dramatic Association. In 1881 Arthur F. LeBlanc was the manager of the club and gained publicity for his group by sending complimentary tickets to productions to the editor of the Plaquemine weekly. At a St. Gabriel Church festival on May 8, 1887, the Bayou Goula Dramatic Club gave a performance of One Year, a four-act comedy-drama. The cast included James K. Snee, A. Landry, H. Claire, N. Richard, and Misses E. Landry, B. Callery, M. Snee, M. Landry, and N. Robicheau. Two weeks later, on May 22 and 23, the group

⁴⁰ Ibid., May 19, 1877.

planned performances at St. Paul's Church Hall in Bayou Goula.⁴¹ The amateurs of Bayou Goula gave productions of Dot, The Miner's Daughter in Bayou Goula April 21, and at White Castle on April 24, 1895. On May 10, 1896, the same play was played at St. John's Hall in Plaquemine for the parochial school benefit. Reviewing the performance in the issue of May 16, the editor of the Iberville South wrote that

. . . St. John's hall was filled with people of the whole parish to see presented by the young people of Bayou Goula what proved to be an interesting and thrilling tragedy, entitled Dot, The Miner's Daughter. All of the actors did remarkably well and proved that their parts had been well learned and carefully rehearsed. . . .

J. N. Richard, Lydia Trahan, and Estelle Landry gave especially meritorious performances. New names appeared in the cast of the Bayou Goula production of Hick'ry Farm, planned for Pythian Hall on July 11, 1897. J. N. Richard, Joseph and R. L. Landry, experienced in earlier plays, were supported by O. L. Bell, J. S. Gonsoulin, Mrs. Dora Landry, and Bertie Duncan, new members of the association's acting corps. The following summer T. B. Cobb joined the group in the cast of A Noble Outcast, a play described as "one of the best ever undertaken by the amateurs."⁴²

Citizens of Brusly Landing, North of Plaquemine in West Baton Rouge Parish, organized a Social and Literary Club in May, 1886. A single news story, in the Iberville South for May 29, 1886, furnished all that is known of the organization. Meetings and dramatic performances were held in Caire's Hall. On May 22 the group presented the farce All's Well that Ends Well with Frank Bird, Henry Hebert, Louis Aillet, and Misses Louise Aillet and A. Bergeron in the cast. Their performances were described as creditable, and the club planned its second entertainment for June 5.

⁴¹Ibid., May 21, 1887.

⁴²Ibid., August 20, 1898.

At Neptune, a small community near Buras in Plaquemines Parish, the Neptune Dramatic Club was active during 1897. Dr. A. H. Victor was president of the club, and George E. Booth was its stage manager. Mollie Beck, vice president; J. D. DeArmas, Jr., secretary; and John Beck, Jr., treasurer, were the other officers. The group gave dramatic performances at Buras for the benefit of the Catholic Church on October 16 and 17. On December 18 the club planned "another one of their celebrated entertainments. . . . in the large and spacious hall of Mrs. Smith, at Buras." The announcement continued to report that "this club which is fast becoming one of the most popular organizations of this parish, merits success" ⁴³

At Convent, located on the East side of the Mississippi River in St. James Parish, drama and music programs by the pupils of Jefferson College ⁴⁴ were the principal community amusements during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. An issue of the St. James Sentinel, dated May 22, 1875, carried an announcement of the Philharmonic Society and plans for a grand ball to be held at Isaac Hebert's New Hall in Convent on June 5. Another item in the same issue stated that on June 12 and 13 St. Michael's Church would sponsor a concert and fair at which "the college boys will give a dramatic performance, and their band will furnish the music." Annual festivals of music, drama, and literary entertainments in the late spring months were probably a custom followed by Jefferson College. Of the performance on May 5, 1884, a reviewer

⁴³ Pointe A La Hache Protector, October 9, December 18, 1897.

⁴⁴ The College of Jefferson was opened as a state supported school in 1834. The buildings burned in 1842, and the school was soon forced to close. In 1855 the school reopened as Louisiana College, and again took the name of Jefferson in 1861. Following the Civil War in 1865, the Marist Fathers, with financial support from Valcour Aime, a St. James Parish planter, bought the school land and buildings and operated Jefferson College as a sectarian school. (See Fortier, History of Louisiana, III, p. 195.)

wrote: "As usual, nothing had been spared to make this anniversary one whose remembrance lingers. . . ." The play was Maurice the Wood Cutter, and it was performed in "an exquisite manner." The college orchestra performed between acts, and the program closed with a series of tableaux described as ". . . magnificent, both in choice of subjects and the richness of the costumes."⁴⁵ On April 27, the following year The Recognition, a four-act drama of the fifteenth century, was presented. A series of tableaux and interludes followed, and the program concluded with a French farce entitled Un Monsieur Qui Prend La Mouche. The names of eighteen students were listed in the casts, with extras as attendants, citizens, soldiers.⁴⁶ William Tell and Les Ressources de Jonathas were the commencement plays on July 14, 1891.⁴⁷ The following year the exercises were extended to two-evening performances, a practice which was still being followed in 1895. On June 25 and 26 the students gave performances of Waiting for the Verdict. In the June 29 issue of the Interim, a reviewer wrote that "the enunciation was perfect and the costumes grand. The tableaux artistically illumined with calcium light, were unusually beautiful and encored. . . ." On November 22, 1896, the Jefferson College St. Cecilia Band sponsored a variety music and dramatic program. Two farces, The Bogus Talking Machine and The Virginia Mummy, were the plays. D. Harang of Lafourche and F. Middleton of Gretna were given high commendations for their acting, and Middleton gave an oration entitled We Are which "was a perfect representation of the negro politician on the stump."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Convent Creole Fireside, May 7, 1884.

⁴⁶ Ibid., April 29, 1885.

⁴⁷ Convent Interim, July 18, 1891.

⁴⁸ Napoleonville Pioneer of Assumption, November 28, 1896.

In the fall of 1898 the St. James Parish Seventh Ward Musical and Dramatic Club was active in Convent. John and Lionel Waguespack and Gabriel Favrot were the directors of the organization, and performances were given in a hall owned and equipped by Waguespack & Company in Convent. On September 24 and 25 the club presented a program of concert music and a French comedy which netted \$516.90 for the organization. Details of the club's activities were seldom published in the brief notices which appeared in the Interim; however, the group sponsored a ball at their hall on February 4, 1899, a fair with concert and dramatic performances on April 22 and 23, and two performances on August 26 and 27, 1899. Jefferson College gave Triumph of Justice, a three-act drama, and a French farce entitled L'Enfant bien gardé as commencement plays on July 18; during the third week in November, 1899, the musical organizations of the college celebrated the anniversary of St. Cecelia, their patron saint of music, with vocal and instrumental music programs and with an evening of one-act plays including Tried and Found Wanting, The Trial of Augustus Swindle, and The Jamestown Fotografer.⁴⁹

During 1887 the Donaldsonville Amateur Minstrel Company was widely recognized in the southern section of Louisiana as "the best amateur company in the state."⁵⁰ Of other non-professional theater organizations in the Ascension Parish town little information has been discovered. At the beginning of 1887 Phoenix Hall was the theater which served adequately for the Plaquemine Opera Company's production of The Mikado. About this time L. E. Bentley, Harry Thatcher, Henry Comstock, Richard Burke, Arthur Le Blanc, John Hinton, James Finnagan, Leon Levi, John F. Terrio, George

⁴⁹Convent Interim, November 25, 1899. Also Convent Gazette, same date.

⁵⁰Thibodaux Sentinel, April 9, 1887.

Goetz, Charles Maher, Joseph Krieger, Jr., E. Hirth, Dr. John S. Thibault, Ambrose Lanous, and Nicholas Gris formed the Donaldsonville Minstrel Company. From the April 9 issue of the Napoleonville Pioneer of Assumption contemporaries learned that "the minstrels were not organized for profit, but instead their entertainments are given for the benefit of some worthy local object. . ." The Thibodaux Sentinel on the same date stated that the Donaldsonville Minstrels "are not professionals having gotten up their company principally for their own amusement." In announcing their programs the organization consistently gave special invitations to "ladies and children" assuring them "a clean, wholesome evening" of fun. On March 19 the minstrel company performed in Plaquemine; on April 23, at Napoleonville, and on April 30, at Thibodaux. Five years later in July, 1892, the Donaldsonville Minstrel Company again appeared in Plaquemine and Napoleonville. In 1894 the Donaldsonville Dramatic Company, composed of "respectable colored amateurs of Donaldsonville, " organized under the leadership of Joseph Thompson, Sr., to raise funds to build a public school for Negroes. On July 7 and 8 the company gave performances of "The Drunkard's Warning" in Napoleonville for the benefit of the Negro school of that town.⁵¹ In the June 5, 1875, issue of the Convent St. James Sentinel a correspondent wrote in an article headed "HAHNVILLE":

. . . The town of Hahnville, St. Charles Parish, boasts of a dramatic company, elegant churches, a neatly printed and well conducted weekly paper, numerous mechanical establishments, physicians, lawyers, merchants, etc. . . .

The members of the Hahnville Dramatic Company, it must be assumed, were enterprising citizens actively working through theatrical activities to support civic and religious organizations of the community, following generally the pattern of the better known similar groups in other surrounding communities.

⁵¹ Napoleonville Pioneer of Assumption, July 7, 1894.

In 1884, Hahnville supported the St. Charles Brass Band in its series of concerts and grand balls held in the "spacious Concert Hall."⁵² The following year Joseph W. Carew, local publisher and owner of Hahnville Hall, advertised the hall for rent to groups for "parties, picnics, soirees, meetings, etc., on reasonable terms." Professional theater companies used the hall occasionally;⁵³ however, the few issues of the paper that are preserved gave no further mention of locally sponsored theater activity.

In July, 1897, a Lutch merchant named Reynaud completed a new store building and public hall. Soon thereafter a group of citizens interested in community theater organized the Lutch Dramatic Club. Of the early performances no specific information has been found. In October, 1899, the Convent Gazette, in announcing the opening of the new season of the club, recalled that it was the same organization which "last year gave performances in the town of Lutch, which readily found favor with the public drawing large attendances. . . ." On March 18, the club gave a benefit performance for the Woodmen of the World, and two weeks later appeared in a production of the "domestic drama," Hazel Kirke.⁵⁴ On April 29, Prisoner of War, and on May 27, Saved, or A Wife's Peril, concluded the spring performances. The Private Secretary, a popular comedy among professional company repertoires, was selected to begin the fall season on October 28, 1899. C. A. Smith, A. J. Brower, A. C. Byers, Charles Schmidt, Sallie Haile, Camille and Mollie Oubre, Paul Dupuy, and A. C. Cloud appeared in the production.⁵⁵ On November 18, another group of young men of Lutch gave a minstrel performance and were

⁵²Hahnville St. Charles Herald, June 14, 21, 1884.

⁵³Ibid., January 1, May 7, 1887.

⁵⁴Convent Interim, March 25, April 29, 1899.

⁵⁵Convent Gazette, November 4, 1899.

"liberally applauded." Information is insufficient to reveal whether the two groups were collaborators or rivals for the favor of the community.

At Pointe A La Hache, Plaquemines parish seat, a dramatic club was active for a short time in 1888 and 1889. The lack of a suitable theater building was an important influence. The community had built up a successful band organization under the leadership of Robert Hingle. A fair for the benefit of the band on May 5, 1888, concluded with the performance of two one-act farces, Whose Baby Is It? and Unlimited Cheek, or the Sewing Machine Agents. A. J. and Paul Badeaux, Cleophas and Octavius Hingle, and H. Martin performed in these plays, which were probably original scripts written for the occasion.⁵⁶ The band group celebrated its fifth anniversary with a dinner, concert, and ball on August 4, and the Dramatic Club gave a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera H. M. S. Pinafore on October 27. An orchestra selected from members of the local band performed, and Mrs. L. Sharp was commended for her work in the production. In an attempt to reorganize the dramatic club during the spring of 1889, the Protector editor recommended that a pavilion be fitted up for use as a theater. The final notice concerning the group appeared in the December 21 issue of the Protector, at which time a correspondent identified as "Our Observer" reported that "the Dramatic Club is having frequent rehearsals and will be ready to make its debut on New Year's Eve."

St. Gabriel, located on the east bank of the Mississippi River between Plaquemine and Bayou Goula in Iberville Parish, organized its Impromptu Dramatic Club to provide entertainment at its church fairs. On June 7, 1885, Father Laval of St. Gabriel Catholic Church organized the congregation into

⁵⁶ Pointe A La Hache Protector, April 28, 1888.

committees to manage a general fair for the benefit of the church and its cemetery. The Baton Rouge Silver Cornet Band provided music and in the evening the Impromptu Dramatic Club presented The Two Buzzards and The Dutchman's Ghost. The event netted "over eight hundred dollars" for the beneficiary.⁵⁷

A two evening "moonlight festival" was sponsored by the same church group on May 7 and 8, 1887. Mrs. A. Allain served as general manager of activities, and Dr. F. E. Posey directed the Impromptu Club production of The Rough Diamond on the first evening. In the cast were James A. Ventress, Paul B. Jumel, F. J. Swoop, W. E. Hillman, Ida Hebert, Edna and Ophelia Hall, Charles Grassin, and George Babin. Other members of the Impromptu Club included Mrs. E. Keiser, Anna Joly, Alice Thompson, L. T. Postell, a visitor from Plaquemine, A. Richard, J. Pritchard and Humphrey Hebert. On the following evening the Bayou Goula Amateur Dramatic Club presented One Year. From the events of the two-day festival the church netted about \$1100.⁵⁸ Announcement of a renewal of these annual church fairs was made in the July 11, 1896, issue of the South. For seven years the congregation had permitted the Impromptu Club to lapse into inactivity. Programs for the two-day event projected for July 25 and 26 were to include "a dramatic performance by amateurs, music, vocal and instrumental." There was no correspondent to submit a review; in fact, if there were succeeding festivals at St. Gabriel, they passed unreported.

A neighboring Iberville parish town, White Castle, south of St. Gabriel and Bayou Goula had an active dramatic club in 1896 known as the Social Twenty. The club advertised a benefit performance of Comrades at the White Castle Opera House on May 20 for the volunteer fire company.⁵⁹ According

⁵⁷ Plaquemine Iberville South, June 6, 13, 20, 1885.

⁵⁸ Ibid., May 14, 1887.

⁵⁹ Ibid., May 9, 1896.

to brief history of the town published in the August 22 issue of the South, the opera house had been erected some years earlier, was well equipped with scenery, and traveling professional troupes had been giving performances during the winter seasons since the theater was built. The local theater group did not gain later comment in the Plaquemine weekly. On June 10, 1897, the Plaquemine Amateur Dramatic Club gave a performance on The Courier of Lyons at White Castle, and on July 10, 1898, a group known as The Point Social Club, "an organization composed of good actors," was scheduled for a performance. Of non-professional theater activity in White Castle, as of similar activity in the other communities presented in this section, too little reporting was done to permit a complete survey. The information is sufficient, however, to show that drama was an important element in the social and cultural development in this and other smaller communities of the area.

BAYOU LAFOURCHE

Napoleonville

Reviewing the Napoleonville Dramatic Club production of The Turn of the Tide in the October 17, 1895, issue of the Pioneer of Assumption, a writer recalled;

Napoleonville has, in the past, been honored with some magnificent entertainments, as Richard III in '65; the Tableaux of '76 and '84, under the supervision of Mrs. Geo. W. Jones; but never in its annals has the old Court House resounded with more unanimous applause than was elicited by the entertainment of last Saturday night. . . .

This brief comment suggests the community dramatic activity in Napoleonville during the Reconstruction period. With the resumption of publication of the pioneer in 1877, a more detailed recording of non-professional theater productions began. In July the Napoleonville String Band sponsored Mr. Frosts Cosmorama and lectures which presented places and objects of "interests and renown," including views of comical, humorous, historical, scriptural

ENTERTAINMENT

- - -FOR THE BENEFIT OF---

NAPOLÉONVILLE FIRE Co. No. 1,

TO BE GIVEN AT NAPOLLEONVILLE COURT HOUSE

Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 10 and 11, 1885.

PROGRAMME.

(SATURDAY NIGHT)

Overture (Prometheus) piano and violin MR. AND MRS. C. GRAY

"THE TURN OF THE TIDE."

DRAMA, in 3 acts, by HENRY WILKINS.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which
Taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Jonas Aldrich, a fisherman Dr. E. DUGAS
Capt Hugh St. Morris, commander of the ship "Tidal Wave"

Mr. J. FOLSE

Col Ellsworth, a wealthy ship owner	Mr. A. LANIER
Herman Clyde, captain of the pirates.	Dr. W. JONES
Bowieknife Jack (robbers	Mr. T. FOLEY
Slingshot Robs (Mr. A. TETE
Pepper, a colored individual	Mr. H. FOLEY
Aunt Rebecca, fisherman's wife,	Mrs. J. B. FOLEY
Susie Aldrich, Ocean waif,	Miss L. SIMS
Lillian Lucy, Clyde's deserted wife,	Miss E. BLANCHARD
Frisky, with no one to love,	Miss E. MUNSON

ACT I. JONES' residence—The gathering storm—The sunset gun—Pepper struck by lightning—Robbery.

Norma, violin and piano,..... Mr. AND Mrs. C. GRAY

ACT II. The combat—Death of Clyde, with tableau.—Music.

•Invitation to the waltz, Mr. AND MRS. C. GRAY

ACT III. *One year later—Pepper's dream—Old friends meet, &c*

Song and chorus of "Wait for the Turn of the Tide, by all the performers.

Selections from Martha,.....MR. AND MRS. C. GRAY
The entertainment to conclude with dancing on both nights.

The entertainment to conclude with dancing on both nights.

(SUNDAY NIGHT.)

"LE NIAIS DE SOLOGNE."

A French Comedy in 1 act.

CHARACTERS.

Overture NAPOLEONVILLE PELICAN B. E.

M. Duval (opérateur).....	Mr. S. J. LANDRY
Mme Duval.....	Mrs L. LEBLANC
Angelique (filles).....	Miss E. HELLU
Lindor (agence lat. de Paris).....	Mr. J. U. FOLSE
Georget (corsets de Sois-gue).....	Dr. C. M. MENVILLE
Lucas (garçon de M. Duval).....	P. J. GILBER

Solo (green) _____

PART II

"ON DEMANDE DES DOMESTIQUES."

and we have $\mathcal{C} = \mathcal{C}_1 \cup \mathcal{C}_2$. Consider an arbitrary $C \in \mathcal{C}_1$.

CHARACTERS.

Beauveruonia
 Boissyd
 Routhignae Mr. J. U. FOLS

One of the attractions will be a beautiful drop curtain: "The Ruin of Carthage," worthy the price of admission itself.

Music by the Napoleonville Pelican Brass Band at intervals

Doors open at 7 o'clock. Performances begin at 7:30 o'clock.

Refreshments, &c., to be had on the grounds.

ADMISSION. Adults, 50c.; Children 25c.

PIONEER OF ASSUMPTION
Napoleonville, October 3, 1885

artistic nature. The Good Heart Dramatic Club, probably a religious group, were scheduled to appear in a dramatic performance and grand soiree at Fireman's Hall on the evening of July 13, 1878; and on May 3 and 4, 1879, Dr. Guiot directed a production of a five-act French drama, Le Fils de l'Aveugle. The production, elaborately staged, was given in the Assumption Parish Court House for the benefit of the Catholic Church. Charles Dupaty, the local editor attended a late rehearsal of the play and wrote on May 3:

. . . The interior of the Court House, under the supervision of Dr. Guiot, one of our most prominent medical men, has been completely metamorphosed from the Temple of Justice to the Temple of Thespis.

By reference to the programme it will be seen that the character of the French drama to be performed, rendered it requisite to alter materially the stage scenery, &c., so as to give the tout ensemble of the front view of the scenery, a grand and imposing appearance. By special request we attended a rehearsal of Le Fils de l'Aveugle, a drama in 5 acts, by Gabriel Hugelmänn, with which none can fail to be delighted--as represented by the accomplished histrionics in the cast. . . . The rich, costly and elaborate costumes, selected by Dr. Guiot in New Orleans for this special purpose, are perfectly appropriate, and give a striking effect to one of the most charming and instructive dramas of modern times.

In April, 1880, the Napoleonville volunteer fire company completed a new hall, equipped with a "large stage" and appropriate accessories "desirable for theatricals, balls, fairs, etc." Following a grand ball held on April 22 at which time the building was dedicated, members of the fire company motivated a temporary organization of the "best artists of the parish" to produce a series of entertainments for the financial support of the organization. Dr. E. T. Dugas became the leading individual in productions during the first years. He directed or supervised rehearsals, he acted in both English and French plays, and was regarded generally as the guiding hand for community entertainment in Napoleonville, and in Paincourtville, a neighboring town six miles north of the Assumption parish seat. The Hoyden and an unnamed French play, on August 28 and 29, were the first productions

of the group in the new theater. In the cast of the English drama appeared Felix Gaudin and a group of six young women including E. Tete, F. Webster, N. M. and Florence Jones, Annie Munson, and Mrs. Cook. Drs. Guiot and Dugas, Mrs. Guiot and two young women of the Polse family were the performers in the French play. The acting, according to comments by the weekly editor, was creditable; the costuming of the French play was given particular commendation.⁶⁰ The club performed at Paincourtville, supporting a benefit for the Paincourtville band, on September 25, and the Napoleonville Fire Company attended the entertainment in full dress "to aid in the enterprise." On June 4, 1881, the Episcopal Church sponsored a dramatic performance; on the following evening a concert and grand ball closed the two-day fair designed to provide funds for the church rectory. Dr. Dugas planned variety programs for the fire company on August 11 and 12, 1883. The first evening the Paincourtville band played concert and popular comic selections, and accompanied a twelve member unit in a broom drill; the acting corps of the club presented The Young Collegian, a one-act farce. The program of the second evening opened with a concert by the band, and the dramatic club appeared in a one-act French play, Le Désespoir de Jocrisse. At the Christ Church fair on May 20, 1884, the dramatic club gave a performance of an unnamed play which proved popular with the audience. Stage settings were attractive, the garden scene of one act being described as "aesthetic in the variety, beauty and arrangement of the floral decorations."⁶¹ Mrs. George W. Jones, a veteran director of twenty years' experience,⁶² designed and managed the tableaux for the Catholic Church benefit on June 14 and 15. Settings were elaborate, costumes

⁶⁰ Napoleonville Pioneer of Assumption, September 11, 1880.

⁶¹ Ibid., May 24, 1884.

⁶² Ibid., June 21, 1884.

were selected for their appropriateness to characters and the subjects. Calcium lights of "delicate hue" were thrown on the stage and "greatly enhanced the scenic effect of the tableaux." The program had variety in both content of the subjects selected, and the age groups of the acting corps.

. . . The first tableau represented a fairy scene in a picturesque forest, beneath two graduated arches of silver leaves and colored flowers. On a . . . throne reclined Titania, Queen of the Fairies Grouped around in the most graceful attitudes, or peeping through the branches and shrubs, were twelve tiny fairies. . . . Then came the "Lady of the Lake." . . . She appeared in a tartan scarf in the act of rowing her boat to the shore of a beautiful lake--water lilies, rushes and ferns being so arranged that it seemed a veritable lakeshore. . . . "The Gypsy's Warning," by seventeen ladies and gentlemen, was well received. Nothing could exceed the naturalness of the camp with the tents, boiling pot, etc. . . .

On the following August 16 and 17 the dramatic club performances grossed \$877.95 for the market-house and town hall funds. On the first evening the program consisted of a three-act comedy, Two Roses, and concert music including Serenade, sung by Ella Beasley, Back to Our Mountains from Il Trovatore, sung by Mrs. Thomas Pugh and Dora Folse, and Silvery Waves, a duet by Ada and Emma Himel. Fannie Webster, assisted by Misses M. Foley, L. Bordis and V. Vives, directed the production. The French comedy Le Testament de César Girodot on the second evening was directed by Dr. E. T. Dugas.^{62a}

A number of new actors appeared in both the English and French casts. T. B. Foley, P. S. Pugh, E. P. Helluin, H. B. Foley, Jr., two folse boys--Joseph and H.,-- and Viola Beasley and Elodie Foley worked in the English branch of the club. Dr. Charles M. Menville, E. Thibodaux, L. Hebert, P. Gilbert, J. C. Thibodaux, J. Folse, and Misses Dora Folse, M. Vives, and T. Pintado appeared in the French production.

^{62a}

Ibid., August 9, 23, 1884.

A disastrous fire on November 7 "destroyed more than two-thirds of the town," including the Firemen's Hall Theater. It was not until October, 1885, that the dramatic club produced another play. This time they turned again to the large room in the parish Court House and improvised a theater. Dr. Dugas worked in these productions only as an actor, and directing duties were taken over by Mrs. Lizzie C. Sims and Dr. Chas. M. Menville. Mrs. Sims, the widow of the late Judge William Sims of Donaldsonville, had moved her family to Napoleonville where she taught in the public school.⁶³ Dr. Menville, a member of the French section of Napoleonville Dramatic Club in 1884, assumed direction of the club's French productions. On October 10 the English group produced Henry Wilkins' The Turn of the Tide, a melodrama to be an often repeated piece of the club's repertoire. The first French program under Dr. Menville was a series of three one-act plays, given on October 11. For the sets of these productions Charles Gray painted "appropriate scenery" and a large drop curtain for the stage on which he designed and painted scenes of "the Ruins of Carthage." Gray and his wife also provided an accompaniment of "appropriate music . . . which was a great improvement, tending to produce a theatrical effect not generally seen on the amateur stage." Reviewing these productions in the October 17 issue of the Pioneer, the editor commended Mrs. Sims' excellent casting and careful direction. Dr. Menville deserved great credit for "the ability he displayed in personating . . . the Niais de Sologne," the title role in the first of three one-act plays. On demande des Domestiques was the second play, and the program closed with the Paincourtville Dramatic Club's production of La Grammaire. On January 25, 1886, the Napoleonville Dramatic Club, under the direction of Mrs. Sims, gave a performance at Phoenix Hall, Donaldsonville. The play, not named in the

⁶³Thibodaux Sentinel, October 31, 1885.

review, "went off splendidly; the hall was crowded and the audience appreciative. The universal opinion seems to be that the performance was one of the best ever given here by amateurs."⁶⁴

The Napoleonville Dramatic Club was virtually inactive during the remainder of 1886 and the two years immediately following, an inactivity which no doubt resulted in part from the fact that the group had no theater. At its monthly meeting on September 20, 1886, the Philologia Dramatic Club, "composed of the élite of society of upper Assumption," elected club officers: J. P. Dalferes, president; J. P. Fernandez, Vice-president; E. M. Hebert, recording secretary, M. D. Dalferes, corresponding secretary, D. D. Dalferes, treasurer, and Antonio V. Pintado, ~~director~~ and stage manager. Programs of the Philologia Club were given monthly, probably alternating among the plantation homes of its members.⁶⁵ There is no evidence of the group's giving performances in Napoleonville.

After April 23, 1887, on which date the Donaldsonville Minstrels gave a performance at the Court House, no other amateur programs were reported until the summer of 1888, when the new Napoleonville theater was opened.

On May 26, 1888, the Pioneer announced that the Napoleonville Fire Company Number One were having a two-story hall erected on the company's new lot. In June the organization sponsored a grand ball, the proceeds from which were "to be used in paying for their new hall." However, when amateur productions were resumed later in the year, they were given at the

⁶⁴ Napoleonville Pioneer of Assumption, January 30, 1886. Review by "A friend who attended the entertainment."

⁶⁵ Ibid., October 2, 1886.

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Phelps Opera House.⁶⁶

Mrs. Lucille LeBlanc, a public school teacher, initiated a move to reorganize the dramatic club in July and on the twelfth day of that month produced The Turn of the Tide for a public school benefit. Many of the members of the 1885 production cast again appeared in the play. Dr. E. T. Dugas, Joseph U. Folse, J. A. Lanier, T. S. Foley, A. Tete, Henry B. Foley, Jr., Alice Jones, and Enola Blanchard repeated their earlier performances, being joined by W. E. Howell, A. P. LeBlanc, and Isabella Jones. The Paincourtville Dramatic Club scheduled performances at Phelps Opera House on October 10 and 11. The management of the theater catered to traveling professional theatrical troupes during the winter season, booking engagements by the Marion Fidler Comedy Company and the Ranch King Company during December.⁶⁷

Mrs. E. L. Hebert directed the pupils of her private school in a series of children's plays on January 25, 1890. Dot, the Miner's Daughter by the amateurs under the direction of Mrs. LeBlanc on September 16, netted the school fund \$157.95. The dramatic club was inactive during 1891; however, the group with several new members repeated Dot, The Miner's Daughter for the Catholic Church on May 7, 1892. Dr. R. A. Truxillo, who had acted in earlier French productions and Dr. G. J. Thibodaux, a Napoleonville pharmacist who was later mayor of the town, joined the English section of the club. The Donaldsonville Minstrel Troupe again played in Napoleonville on July 17, and the amateur activities for the year closed with a band festival and dramatic performance by the Dramatic Club on September 25.

⁶⁶Since Fireman's Hall was not mentioned in connection with later theater productions, it seems likely that W. L. Phelps, a Napoleonville business man, financed the construction and later assumed ownership.

⁶⁷Napoleonville Pioneer of Assumption, December 15, 29, 1888.

Hereafter, the Napoleonville Dramatic Club restricted its activity to one of two major English productions each year. Oftentimes it repeated the plays in neighboring towns. No other French plays were given. Mrs. E. L. Hebert planned and directed a variety program made up of two one-act plays, a tableau, and a miscelbany of serious and comic music on february 4, 1893, for the benefit of the Catholic Church. On May 11 Mayor O. J. Thibodaux directed a Dramatic Club production of Tried and True for the public school fund. On June 1 the play was repeated at Plattenville. Clarence J. Jones, John Marks, Judge Philip H. Gilbert, Blair S. Bernard, R. A. Gheringer, Solomon Klotz and Bella M. Gilbert were new members in the cast. The Thibodaux Dramatic Company visited Napoleonville for a production of the currently popular Shadows of a Great City on June 5, 1894. The Donaldsonville Negro Dramatic Club, directed by Joseph Thompson, Sr., appeared at Phelps Opera House in The Drunkard's Warning on July 7 and 8 for the benefit of the Napoleonville Negro school. During the following week the Napoleonville club went to Paincourtville for a production of Hick'ry Farm, contributing to a church fair in the neighboring town. During the fall Phelps opera house closed, and the community was again without a theater. The following June "the Arena, over the Pioneer office" was equipped with stage and seats and was opened as Dupaty Hall with a production of Hick'ry Farm, the first in Napoleonville, on June 21. The dramatic club followed with Trustee on December 31, with Thomas Jones, Temple Shepherd, Isabella Jones and Ida Weil gaining the reviewer's commendations for their performances.⁶⁸ My Turn Next, a one-act comedy given as a unit of a variety program for the fire company on May 7,

⁶⁸Ibid., January 4, 1896.

1896, was the last performance by the dramatic club until Mrs. Lucille LeBlanc reorganized the group in 1899.

During the closing months of 1898 Louis Corde, a Napoleonville business man, built the Corde Opera House, Dupaty Hall having previously been closed as a theater. The new opera house was opened on December 30 with The Way of the World, the first of a week's performances by the Charles King Theatrical Troupe.⁶⁹ On January 6 the Katie Cabell Currie Chapter of United Daughters of the Confederacy sponsored a variety program of patriotic tableaux and music. The production was directed by Mrs. LeBlanc, assisted by Mrs. L. H. Pugh, wife of the superintendent of Napoleonville public schools. The lengthy program, build on a chronology of "the Union, Secession, and Reunion," brought together the largest cast employed in a single production by the Napoleonville amateurs. The performance was repeated on January 31, and on April 4 the same organization sponsored a children's program of tableaux for the benefit of the Nicholls' Home for aged veterans in New Orleans.

It was practically a new membership which made up the newly organized Napoleonville Dramatic Club in April, 1899. Mrs. Lucille LeBlanc was manager and director of production. Gyp, The Heiress, produced on May 2 for the benefit of the Napoleonville waterworks fund, included besides Mrs. LeBlanc, Misses L. Kling and H. Bertin; F. J. Rodrigue, Philip LeBlanc, Temple Shepherd, R. Bergeron, and Eugene Roger. In June Charles Munson, Eddie Gianelsoni, Abner A. Folse, H. Joe Verret, Emile Hebert, Ida Weil, Josie LeBlanc, Mrs. John Marks, Jessie Iyer, and Clarence Jones joined the club for a production of Among the Breakers, the final

⁶⁹ Ibid., December 31, 1898.

play during the 1899 season. The Napoleonville production was given on June 6. On July 30 the club gave a performance at Paincourtville, where the play and the accompanying fair netted \$585.00 for the sponsoring Catholic Church. The same play was given a third and final 1899 performance at Bayou Goula on August 27.

The survey of non-professional theater activity in Napoleonville indicates that the dramatic club had able direction by Dr. E. T. Dugas, Mrs. William Sims, and Mrs. Lucille LeBlanc. The choice of plays and the favorable audience response to club productions support the conclusion that the acting was of a relatively high quality, and reviews of the productions included adequate evidence to indicate that stage decorations and costuming were important factors contributing to the productions by the amateur organization.

Paincourtville

In Paincourtville, a short distance north of Napoleonville on Bayou Lafourche, the citizens had organized a Philharmonic Society with brass band, orchestra, a chorus, and a number of able vocal soloists. In 1885 Dr. E. T. Dugas, the veteran actor and director of the Napoleonville Dramatic Club since 1880, formed the Paincourtville Dramatic Club. The organization was "composed of well known ladies and gentlemen of this parish, who have at heart the success of their enterprise, which is purely a charitable one, and no pains will be spared to give a pleasing entertainment." Thus the Napoleonville weekly described the new acting group in announcing their first program scheduled for June 21. The Philharmonic Society and the dramatic club gained popular

and financial success in their joint productions during the next ten years. Generally, the band opened the programs and the Chorus directed by Emma Landry, performed between plays. The dramatic club, as a rule, prepared two one-act plays for each program. For a theater the groups used "the spacious hall used for the fairs at Poincourtville" which they had "fitted up and handsomely decorated." The theater doors were usually opened at 7 and performances began at 7:30 or 7:45. Price of admission was fifty cents.

The Dramatic Club played two French comedies at their initial performance: Les Suites d'un Premier Mariage and La Poudre Aux Yeux. Dr. E. T. Dugas, the director, also acted in both plays. Other members of the club who acted in these first plays were Henry J. Webre, J. M. Hubert, Mrs. P. Rodrigue, Mrs. Elodie Webre, Emma Hebert, J. E. LeBlanc, Oscar F. Landry, A. E. Hebert, P. S. Lauve, Mrs. A. P. Lauve, Mrs. Angela Dugas.

On July 23 the Mont Carmel Convent near Poincourtville conducted annual commencement exercises. The Briton Cottage, or A Mother's Curse, a three-act drama, was the feature of the exercise. Various pupils performed musical numbers; there was an address by Agnes Gianelloni; and the program closed with a French dialogue entitled Ramède Contra La Paresse. La Grammaire and Les Vivacités du Capitaine Tic were the plays on the second Dramatic Club-Philharmonic Society program on September 27. Despite the fact that Oscar F. Landry and Dr. Dugas were commended for their excellent performances, the choral work of the Philharmonics gained great favor with the large audience and the reviewer:

. . . The chorus of the Philharmonic Club furnished the audience with exquisite selections, chosen and guided by Miss Emma Landry. This club surely deserves credit for its artistic merits, and it is with the best wishes and fondest hopes that we see it guided by such accomplished excellence. . . . In our eulogiums we cannot forget the talented ladies who assisted in enlivening the time with their beautiful vocal solos. They are Mrs. F. Dugas and Mrs. D. P. Landry. To them we can frankly say, belong the honors of the evening. . . .⁷⁰

In July, 1886, occurred the only dramatic performance recorded for the year in Paincourtville. The Rev. J. B. Le Saicherre of St. Elizabeth Church began a movement to raise funds for a new building. On July 10 and 11 the Dramatic Club gave performances for the fund benefit. On July 15 the Mont Carmel Convent closing exercises were held. Magdalen, or The Orphan of the Pyrenees, in two acts; Le Crime De Béchamel, an operetta; and Ste-Germaine, a French drama in four acts, made up in the program. Viola Kelly of New Orleans and Coalie Blanchard gave versatile performances in the productions. Agnes Le Blanc and Clemence Guedry were designated the outstanding vocalists of the evening.

During the early months of 1887 the Paincourtville Dramatic Club, supported by civic-minded citizens, built a new hall and equipped the stage with necessary scenery. The first performance in the new theater included an

⁷⁰ Ibid., October 3, 1885.

THE DRAMA

ATTENTION! ATTENTION!!

COME ONE AND ALL AND SEE THE GRAND

DRAMATIC ENTERTAINMENTS

—To be given by the—

PAINCOURTVILLE DRAMATIC CLUB

WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY,

OCTOBER 10 and 11, 1888,

At PHELPS HALL, Napoleonville,

ENGLISH PERFORMANCE WEDNESDAY NIGT.

FRENCH " THURSDAY "

On both nights there will be a fine String Band and Brass Band in attendance.

Refreshments of all kinds will be served at very moderate prices during the whole evenings.

There will also be a Bar, supplied with the choicest liquors.

Admission, 50c. Reserved Seats, 25c extra.

Doors open at half past seven. Performance commences at eight.

Remember the Days and Dates — Wednesday and Thursday, October Tenth and Eleventh.

PIONEER OF ASSUMPTION
Napoleonville, October 6, 1888

English play Broken Promises on August 27. The following evening the three-act French comedy Les Vivacités du Capitaine Tic was repeated. For the Catholic Church building fund the club performed again on June 23 and 24, 1888. Dearer Than Life and Le Garçon D'Honneur were the plays. The dramatic performances and the accompanying fair netted sixteen hundred dollars for the church fund.⁷¹ On July 19 a wind storm wrecked the new Painscourtville theater, and the dramatic club gave performances at Phelps Hall, Napoleonville, on October 10 and 11 for the benefit of the club's rebuilding fund. At this time Antonio V. Pintado, P. Landry, Mary LeBlanc, Misses C. Rodrigue and A. Guedry, Mrs. J. Dominique, P. Rodrigue, Joseph U. Folse, E. A. Lauve, and Joseph E. LeBlanc had become members of the dramatic club acting corps. The project to rebuild the theater failed, however, and the club returned to the hall opposite the old St. Elizabeth Church which they had used in the beginning.

Activities of the Dramatic Club and the Philharmonic Society now seemed to be restricted to benefit performances for the new church. On July 13 and 14 "tableaux, magic views, and various other performances" were planned. Emma Landry planned a concert and a "fine string band under the leadership of Pierre Landry" was included on the program. On October 13 the club repeated the French farce Les Suites d'un Premier Mariage, with "many amusing comic scenes and grand vocal performances by eminent artists."

Announcing a three-day church fair and musical and dramatic entertainments for July 18, 19, 20, 1891, the editor of the Pioneer of Assumption stated that the general management was in the hands of Rev. Father Renaudier, assisted by his Board of Trustees. However, Dr. Dugas continued to direct the dramatic productions. On this occasion the plays were given in the auditorium of the unfinished new church where an improvised stage had been built

⁷¹Ibid., June 30, 1888.

and new scenery painted. The Guedry Family furnished music: Marie, piano; Albert, flute; and their father, violin. La Main Leste, on July 18, and Won at Last, on the following evening, were presented by the experienced members of the Dramatic Club. Florence Klotz, a new member, "captivated the audience" as the heroine of the English play. Cecile Delaune was another actress who appeared for the first time with the club in this production. Audiences were liberal, the fair and plays netting \$1950.00.

The Dramatic Club returned to the old hall for performances during the church fair on April 29 and 30, 1893. The Napoleonville Dramatic Club performed at the fair the following year, presenting Hick'ry Farm on July 14. On the following evening the Paincourtville troupe provided a variety entertainment of music, tableaux, and recitations. Thereafter the reports of dramatic activities in Paincourtville carried by the Napoleonville weekly were infrequent items. A fair was announced for August 10, 11, and 12, 1895. No mention was made of the usual dramatic performances. In May the following year the paper announced "a grand dramatic entertainment" for the benefit of the Catholic Church, and a final notice appeared in the issue of July 17, 1897, announcing "a grand concert and dramatic entertainment" for the following evening.

After 1893 Dr. E. T. Dugas probably found less time for amateur theatricals. He had been active in Napoleonville's Dramatic Club from 1883 to 1888. From 1885 to 1893 he directed all productions of the Paincourtville Club. Both organizations maintained wide interest in their respective communities during the years of his leadership. Paincourtville, being a smaller community, probably followed a policy of letting temporary organization provide the leadership for individual church fair productions during the closing years of the decade.

Thibodaux

During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century Thibodaux continued to be the chief center of theater activity among communities along Bayou Lafourche. Several non-professional groups effected organizations at intervals during the period, the more prominent ones being the Evergreen Dramatic Club of Thibodaux during 1882 and 1883 and the Men of Mirth during 1892 through 1894. Schools increased in number and their dramatic entertainments gained in importance as community activities. After 1883 when the new Firemen's Hall was built on St. Bridget Street, commercial theater became more profitable. Touring companies played in Thibodaux with increasing frequency; however, the fare presented by professional troupes had not succeeded in supplanting the energetic amateur theater in Thibodaux by the end of the century.

Waverley Hall, the theater in the Larkin-Grisamore Building at the corner of Levee and St. Louis Streets, was in 1880 the best equipped theater in Thibodaux, though its stage and auditorium were small. On the evenings of March 31 and April 1 performances were given at Waverley Hall for the benefit of Guion Academy. The Standard Dramatic Club, a newly organized group, presented a program of four one-act plays on the first evening. Irish Sketch, The Harvest Storm, One Night in a Bar Room, and The Picture Gallery provided roles for thirteen members of the club. Joseph A. Troné, principal of the academy, assisted by other teachers, directed pupils of the school in a program of three one-act plays on the following evening. The Toodles, Queen of the Fairies, and Beware of the Widows were the plays. On both evenings the theater was filled. The children's program was played before an audience where there was "scarcely standing room." Anatole Panalle and Mrs. M. C. LeBlanc, teachers at the Thibodaux Corporation school for

Negroes, directed programs at Waverley Hall on December 25 and January 1, 1881. The two programs netted \$140 for the school operating fund. Reviewing the performances of the pupils, the editor of the weekly noted that

. . . While at prior occasions, during entertainments given by both the Grisamore and Corporation Schools, notwithstanding gradual and appreciable progress, imperfection in language, style and action of the performing pupils were periodically noticeable, we were glad to perceive the almost faultless pronunciation, the generally neat and well combed execution of the representations, were wholly made up by the pupils of the Corporation School. . . . We are also glad to commend the industry and efforts of the young performers, among whom we are pleased to mention Misses Alice Thibodaux, Junie Hollins, Mary Norris, Lula Pierre and Josephine Sephus, whose recitations were deserving of all credit, not to speak of Miss Junie's achievements in the drama, which ended the performance, in which her peculiar gifts for light comedy were fully appreciated. Miss Angela Robinett, in a pretty song, also contributed much to the success of the evening, while Masters Christopher and Blanchard Franklin, William Williams, Frank Thompson, Joe Johnson, Frank Norris and Willie Delipo, also fully came up to all reasonable expectations. . . .⁷²

The Fay Templeton Star Alliance opera troupe was at Waverley Hall for a single performance on January 5, 1881; and a month later on February 7, the Seymour Dramatic Company advertised to present Uncle Tom's Cabin as it Was. In April, following these professional performances, the volunteer company initiated a move to provide Thibodaux with "a fine hall which has been sadly needed for many years." Consequently, the group formed a corporation known as Firemen's Hall Association of Thibodaux for the "objects and purposes" of providing a building in the town "to be used and employed for the purposes of public or private spectacle, entertainment or assemblies. . . . The amount of capital stock shall be Ten Thousand dollars (\$10,000) divided into one thousand (1000) shares of ten dollars (\$10.00)

⁷²Thibodaux Sentinel, January 8, 1881

each. . . .⁷³ Charter members of the association--Silas T. Grisamore, Cyprien Asama, Hudson W. Tabor, Sr., R. R. McBride, Osame Naquin, Henry Riviere, J. Louis Auccoin, Richmond A. Frost, Joseph T. Thibodaux, J. G. Oschwald, Leandre Boudreaux, and Joseph L. Webre--proposed the immediate subscription of 250 shares of stock with which to begin the actual business of the organization, permitting construction of the hall to progress as other subscribers to the stock were being solicited. Finding itself unsuccessful in its projected plans after more than a year and a half, the Fireman's Hall Association was dissolved. Its holdings were jointly owned by Thibodaux Fire Company Number One and Home Hook and Ladder Number One. These organizations formed a committee with J. Louis Auccoin as chairman and instructed them to take necessary action to remodel as a public hall the old building on the companies' property facing St. Bridget Street between St. Louis and Green Streets.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, normal theater activities continued at Waverley Hall. On April 28 and 29, 1881, the Thibodaux Presbyterian Church sponsored a children's production of H. M. S. Pinafore. Mrs. J. E. Blanchard was musical director for the cast of "some 25 or 30 children" and the veteran Thibodaux director, I. D. Moore, served as stage manager, "instructing them in their entrances, positions, and exits." F. Sansan, the Sentinel editor, wrote of the performance:

. . . The children did remarkably well, both in their singing and acting. We saw Pinafore in one of the Philadelphia Theatres, a few years ago. The children here surpassed that performance, not only in costume and scenery, but in superior acting and singing. . . . The second evening was equally pleasant, whilst the acting was if anything better. The addition of two brilliant Tableaux rendered the stage effect much more

⁷³Charter, Fireman's Hall Association of Thibodaux, Articles II and VII, as printed in Thibodaux Sentinel, April 25, 1881.

⁷⁴Ibid., December 2, 1882.

brilliant and beautiful. . . .⁷⁵

A further evidence that the children's production was well done is contained in the following request printed in the May 7 issue of the Sentinel:

Office Firemen's Hall Association. Town of Thibodaux, La., April 30th, 1881. Mrs. J. E. Blanchard, Hon. I. D. Moore.

The great success which attended the presentation of H.M.S. Pinafore under your combined Musical talent and Artistical skill, in Waverley Hall on the evenings of April 28, and 29, instant, and the appreciative favor with which it was received by the audiences on each occasion induces me to request that you will repeat the same at an early day, for the benefit of the Firemen's Hall Association of Thibodaux. I am Respectfully, S. T. GRISAMORE, President.

The third production of the operetta was given for the benefit of the association two weeks later on May 12.

The schools of Thibodaux provided the theatrical entertainment during July, 1881. On July 2 and 8 pupils of the Corporation School performed in Waverley Hall. Guion Academy commencement entertainments were given at the Firemen's Fair Grounds on July 6 and 7. Everybody's Friends, a three act drama, followed by a farce entitled A Sell, on the first evening, and three comedies, Model School, A Family Fix, and The Gossip, on the closing evening, made up the programs. Three weeks later, on July 27 and 28, Thibodaux College, the parochial academy, closed its session with productions of St. Louis dans les Chaines, L'Émigré, and an original farce entitled

⁷⁵Ibid., May 7, 1881. The Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were played by amateurs in Louisiana very soon after they were introduced on the American professional stage. Written in 1878, H.M.S. Pinafore was produced by the authors in New York in 1879. The Fay Templeton Star Alliance Opera Company, touring in Louisiana during the 1879-1880 season, played H. M. S. Pinafore at Gerspach's Opera House in Monroe during the week of December 8-15, and in Alexandria during the week of February 9-14, 1881. The Thibodaux production was the first amateur performance of the musical play recorded in Louisiana, though it will be remembered that The Mikado, first produced in 1885, was presented by the Plaquemine Amateur Opera Company in December, 1886. (See George Freedley and John A. Reeves, A History of the Theatre, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1941), p. 565. See also, the Monroe Ouachita Telegraph, December 5, 12, 1879; Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, February 18, 1880; Plaquemine Iberville South, January 1, 1887.)

The Lafourche Packet. The final production during 1881 was Le Martyre d'Agapit, a French tragedy, presented at St. Joseph's Hall on December 17 for a church fund to be used in building a sidewalk leading to the church.

During the spring of 1882 Joseph A. Troné, principal of Guion Academy, directed two productions to raise funds to pay his teachers' salaries for the closing months of the term. On February 8 and 9 the play, given at Waverley Hall, was Money, a five-act comedy. The second program included Robert Macaire, with two farces--Love and Poetry and Politics,-- and was given on May 17.

John D. Fulford, Samuel J. Blum, Louis Thompson, members of the short lived Standard Dramatic Club in 1880, were leading actors in the academy productions. Director Troné, who also appeared in the casts, drew from the large group of experienced performers in the community a sufficient number to complete the large cast needed for the Money production. J. L. Aucoin, Henry Celestin, James Thompson, Edgar Riviere, Albert and Louis Troné, Julius Blum, Adolphe Hoffman, Lawrence Thompson, and Lillian and Julia Thibodaux, and Jennie Blum worked in the productions. Admission price to the benefit plays was fifty cents, and the audiences were of sufficient size to make the projects a "financial success beyond anticipations."⁷⁶

On June 8 the Evergreen Dramatic Club of Thibodaux gave its initial performance. The move to organize the club began in January. The February 4 issue of the Sentinel announced that a constitution had been adopted and that A. J. Lasseigne was the club president and I. D. Moore the stage manager. The club's membership originally numbered

⁷⁶Ibid., February 4, 11; May 13, 20, 1882.

twenty-four "of the choicest among our young men." Editorially, the editor continued:

. . . In the first place we are pleased to learn that an effort is being made to interest our young people in amusements, calculated to impart to them an instructive recreation. There is another reason why the organization of such an association among us meets with our hearty approval, which is the palpable and undisguised fact that in this town much that belongs to our finer being is neglected as if it were despised, while much that encourages the formation of disorderly habits is sedulously cared for.
 . . .

Dion Boucicault's early comedy London Assurance was the club's first play. New scenery for the production aided, according to the review, in making the debut impressive. Five days later, on June 13, London Assurance was repeated. The second audience was as numerous as the first, but its response to the performance lacked enthusiasm. The editor of the French Section of the Sentinel explained to the members of the club some of the reasons for the passive audience. First, an audience loves a change. The change expected of an audience in a repeat performance is more than simply the perfection of line reading; the actor must show a better understanding of the role he is portraying. He must show this deeper realization through his physical appearance and movements;

. . . Ce n'est pas le tout que de connaître la phraseologie de l'auteur de la pièce; il faut encore s'inspirer du caractère et des habitudes du personnage qu'on veut représenter; il faut savoir aussi composer sa physionomie selon les circonstances et faire les gestes à propos. . . .

Among the players who were commended for their performances were Samuel Blum, Charles Tabor, Theophile P. Bergeron, Ellen Springer, Mary Conlan, and Miss S. Dickson. The cast was advised to follow the instructions of the director, to study, to persevere. Then they may expect their next pro-

duction to be much better.⁷⁷

The Evergreen Club next performed on October 4. The plays were two short comedies, Land Me Five Shillings and Paul Pry. Blum and Bergeron were praiseworthy comedians. Albert Lasseigne, the club president, and John Fulford, a new member, contributed to the success of the plays. A benefit performance of Time and The Hour was planned by the club for December 27 and 28. Failure of the group to reach a satisfactory agreement with the management of Waverley Hall caused a postponement of the play until January 18, 1883, to permit the old firemen's hall to be remodeled for the use of the club. Joseph A. Troné painted new scenery for the renovated stage in Firemen's Hall, and Thomas A. Badeaux, a favorite performer during the Reconstruction Period, joined the club to play the leading role in the comedy. J. L. LeBlanc, H. J. Celestin, and Miss L. Dixon gained commendations for their acting. The play was repeated on January 20 and receipts from both performances were given to the teachers' fund of Guion Academy.

Soon after the Evergreen Club moved to the old Firemen's Hall the Fire Companies owning the property began construction of a new and much larger hall which was ready for use the following December. The inactivity brought a loss of interest in the Evergreen Dramatic Club, and the members did not reorganize after the new theater was completed.

In the meantime, St. Joseph's Hall, built by the Catholic congregation for use of the church and parochial school, became the center of dramatic activity in Thibodaux. On February 4 a performance of Le Crime de Barchemin was scheduled at the old hall by "the best musical talent" of the town. The new hall, ninety-eight by forty feet, furnished with

⁷⁷Ibid., June 17, 1882.

a small stage and green room, was first used for a band concert on May 19. The following September 8 was the date of the final performance recorded at Waverley Hall. The Negro dramatic club of Thibodaux gave the entertainment, which was reported without descriptive detail in the September 15 issue of the Sentinel.

The new Firemen's Hall was sufficiently near completion to permit a first production on December 27. From details of the building which were published at intervals during the course of its construction it is possible to give at least an approximate description of Thibodaux's new theater. The structure faced St. Bridget Street at the corner of St. Louis. Overall dimensions measured 126 by 50 feet, the whole being divided into three general areas. The first area, twenty by fifty feet, included the entrance, the vestibule, and the ticket office. Next was the auditorium, about eighty by fifty feet, above which the large dome-shaped roof centered; and finally, the stage area which measured approximately twenty-five by fifty feet.⁷⁸ Below the stage two dressing rooms, communicating with the stage level by individual stairways, were constructed. On one side of the stage was the green room; on the other were the properties room and storage space for scenery.⁷⁹ The cost of the building, financed by subscription, can only be estimated by a preliminary report published in the October 6 issue of the Sentinel:

. . . The amount of \$2874.25 has been received by the building committee and the amount of \$283.00 paid out, leaving on hand \$191.25. This does not include the net proceeds of the late fair, and several amounts subscribed and not yet paid, which will add up about \$1000.00 as the funds on hand.

⁷⁸ Ibid., July 21, 1883.

⁷⁹ Ibid., September 22, 1883.

Before the opening performance a drop curtain "with proper machinery for working it" was installed. F. Sančan, publisher of the Sentinel, designed sets which were painted by Joseph A. Troné. Following the performance, the Sentinel reported that "the acoustics of the Hall are found to be very good."⁸⁰

St. John's Episcopal Church sponsored the first production given in the new theater. Esmeralda, a current favorite among professional theaters throughout the country, was produced by special permission of Daniel Frohman, Madison Square Theater Company in New York, secured by the Thibodaux group through C. H. McConnell, president and manager of the National Printing Company of Chicago.⁸¹ R. R. McBride, A. B. Ragan, and Dr. J. N. Fleetwood were experienced actors in the cast. Others included Ellen Pugh, H. Crozier, J. D. Shaffer, C. Espenan, Miss M. Williams, Lou Pugh, and Effie Shaffer. On the following evening a cast of about fifty children appeared in a series of tableaux entitled The Sleeping Princess. Admission price to the benefit performances was fifty cents. The two-evening program with accompanying concessions netted the church fund \$747.95.⁸² The two productions were repeated for the Firemen's Hall fund on January 8 and 9, 1885. Audiences were small, being estimated at about two hundred each evening. Continuing their efforts to complete finishing details and to equip the theater, the Firemen's Hall Building Committee sponsored productions on February 16 and 17. Miss in Her Teens on the first evening and Fortune's Frolic on the following date drew very

⁸⁰ Ibid., December 27, 1883.

⁸¹ Ibid., December 22, 1883.

⁸² Ibid., January 5, 18, 1884.

favorable attendance. During the closing week in March theater chairs were installed, and the theater was placed under the management of Dr. J. J. Daigre who handled rental arrangements with both commercial companies and local groups.

During the year the building committee sponsored variety programs of music, tableaux, and broom drills. These programs, held on July 3 and 4 and September 5 and 6, were virtually community efforts to raise funds to pay for the theater. On March 21, 1885, the Bartine family professional troupe gave a "specialty" performance for the benefit of the fire department. Professional theater increased in importance in Thibodaux during the years immediately following the building of the new theater. Local non-professional productions were few, only three major productions being recorded between 1885 and 1888.

A new and short-lived organized amateur group known as the Ladies Dramatic Club of Lafourche produced T. W. Robertson's Home on December 16, 1885. On the previous evening the club sponsored a variety program of music and tableaux featuring a Japanese drill and dance in costume. In the cast of Home Dr. J. N. Fleetwood, Mrs. B. Wormald, Miss L. Williams, A. Shaffer, William Price, G. Lanier, and H. Wilson gave creditable performances. Mr. and Mrs. C. S. Gray, visiting musicians from Assumption parish, furnished music for both programs. On February 27, 1886, the Lockport Dramatic Club, directed by Joseph A. Troné, appeared in Tempter, or The Sailor's Return, and the farce D'ye Know Me Now, or Sniggins vs. Jolly. Inclement weather prevented a good attendance at the February performance; thus Troné proposed to return to Thibodaux for a firemen's benefit performance on June 27. From Thibodaux the Troné family, including Albert, Louis, Alice, and their director Joseph A. Troné, toured several

south Louisiana communities presenting a repertoire of "a beautiful little domestic drama, in which the whole family took part, and songs, recitations and character sketches."⁸³

On December 9 and 10, 1886, a group of the experienced amateurs under the management of Mrs. I. D. Moore gave two performances of Dreams, or Lady Clara Vere de Vere for the benefit of "sabbine pass sufferers and the deserving poor" of Thibodaux. C. E. Addison painted new scenery for the production. Theophile P. Bergeron, Sam Blum, and John Fulford acted in the five-act drama, along with less familiar names as J. L. LeBlanc, Edward Badeau, Laurence Thompson, James Miller, Minnie Binnings, Laura LaGarde, and Selena Dixon. The financial report of the production committee showed that the net proceeds amounted to \$433.60.⁸⁴ On the following June 3 and 4, I. D. Moore directed a production of Our Boarding House for the fire company. A. C. Addison was again employed to paint the sets, and W. B. Gray, a Morgan City amateur comedian, was invited to play the role of Col. M. T. Elevator in the comedy. In addition to Gray, the cast included the more popular members of the earlier Evergreen club. Mary Conlan, Sam Blum, John Fulford, Theophile P. Bergeron, Thomas and Lawrence Thompson, Felix Celestin, Edward Badeau, Alfred Malhiot, Susie Harvey, Minnie Binnings, Selena Dixon, and Nellie Stone. Of the production the Sentinel editor wrote:

. . . The performance was very creditable to all who participated in it. The play was very handsomely mounted, the scenery having been painted specially for the occasion by Major Addison. The parlor scene deserves a particular mention, for it was beautiful. The dining-room scene was very true to nature and the charming little waitress who

⁸³Ibid., July 3, 1886.

⁸⁴Ibid., December 18, 1886.

The Charity Entertainment.

The following statements of receipts and disbursements of the charity entertainment given on the 9th. and 10th. inst. for the benefit of the deserving poor of this community and the Sabine Pass sufferers, are submitted.

STATEMENT A.

Refreshment Department, Receipts:	
Total gross proceeds.....	\$451 85
Disbursements:	
Incidental expenses, including servant hire, ice, bread, etc. etc.....	13 35
J. N. Wright, for champagne, wines and liquors.....	70 95
Holden & Belden, New Orleans, for ice cream.....	24 00
E. Miquen for oysters, two asslets, etc.....	20 00
Taylor Legarde, for fruit.....	5 35
Total disbursements.....	\$134 25
Total net proceeds.....	\$317 60

STATEMENT B.

Theatrical Department, Receipts:	
Total gross proceeds.....	\$29 65
Disbursements:	
Incidental expenses.....	11 10
C. E. Addison for painting.....	25 00
Korcha Band, for music.....	15 00
Hoffmann & Ancelet, for paints.....	22 00
Jno. Fulford, for oil.....	11 50
E. H. McBride, trunks, etc.....	2 95
E. Badoux, for oil and candles.....	2 89
F. Blum, cotton, etc.....	10 60
Thibodaux Saw Mill Co., lumber.....	2 30
V. Saneau, for printing.....	11 00
Total disbursements.....	\$123 05
Total net proceeds.....	\$116 60

RECAPITULATION.

Gross receipts, refreshment dept.	451 85
" " theatrical "	29 65
Total gross receipts.....	\$480 50
Gross disbursement, refreshment dept.	134 25
" " theatrical "	123 05
Total gross disbursements.....	\$257 30
Total net proceeds.....	\$433 60

The total net proceeds, (\$433.60), the committee has this day paid over to Mr. F. Saneau, Treasurer of the town of Thibodaux, to be disbursed under the direction of the Town Council. The committee desire to express their sincere thanks to the generous donors who contributed their mite; to the general public for their liberal patronage and to the many ladies, and several gentlemen who assisted the committee in this undertaking and to whose generous and valuable aid is to be mainly attributed the successful result of the entertainment.

MR. I. D. MOORE,
Dec. 15, 1886. Chairman.

fluttered around the table and glibly called out the names of the various dishes on the bill of fare was not the least attractive feature of this part of the play. . . . Seldom has been seen a performance of amateurs that ran so smoothly as the one under consideration.⁸⁵

Comments on the play by DOT, a correspondent whose column appeared in the same issue of the Sentinel differed greatly from that of the editor's review:

. . . Some of our local performers require a good deal of training yet, before they can claim to have attained that degree of excellence which will place them beyond the censure of the public and give them a right to the appreciation and praise of an erudite audience.

We might add that the comedy itself did not meet with the approval of everybody; it has been said that a play could have been selected that would have been more in accord with the taste and refinement of this community.

The above curt criticism and the discussions of the production, which within a month involved leading citizens of the community who were associated with the entertainment, resulted in the lapse of more than a year during which time no amateur productions were reported.

St. Valerie parochial school presented commencement plays on July 20, 1887, the program including Un Bienfait N'est Jamais Perdu and La Rossière. The commercial theater season began on September 26. Directors of Firemen's Hall, working through Johnson and Young, theatrical managers, booked engagements of the R. J. Riley Company, the Boy Hero Company, the J. W. Baird's Minstrels, the Good as Gold Company, Mme Neuville, dramatic reader, Juvenile Opera Company, Wallack and Rider Dramatic Troupe, and Weston Brothers, all of which played in Thibodaux during the next twelve months.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid., June 11, 1887.

⁸⁶ Ibid., September 10, 1887- September 29, 1888, passim.

On October 4, 1888, members of St. Charles Branch No. 336, of the Catholic Knights of America--the Thibodaux Chapter of the organization--gave a performance of Falsely Accused, an original tragedy by Professor Lyons of Notre Dame, Indiana. The production was given at St. Joseph's Hall, and young Thibodaux actors in the cast were commended for excellent acting.

Professional theater seasons continued strong during the following years. In January, 1890, the Sentinel reported improvements made recently in the theater. Parlor furniture was added for stage use; reserved seats were improved and better arranged; the management "stretched a number of wires across the hall which it is believed will greatly improve the acoustics of the building; and the appearance of the theater from the streets was improved by the freshly painted front gate and entrance stairway. To provide funds for having the theater "properly ceiled and finished" the proprietors sponsored a fair and children's performance on May 1, 2 and 3. Mrs. J. E. Blanchard directed the production of Little Red Riding Hood, in which about thirty children performed. Charles W. Thibodaux provided special lighting for the tableaux. Costumes were elaborate, and the performance of the children gained individual comments in the review. The benefit netted the firemen's association \$600.00.⁸⁷

The professional theatrical season opened on October 3 with the Newton Beers Company presenting Lost in London. In December the Chicago Comedy Company was in Thibodaux for a series of performances; the troupe contributed receipts from the final play given on December 26 to the building fund of the fire companies. In March the managing committee in charge

⁸⁷ Ibid., May 10, 17, 1890.

of the hall contracted with H. N. Coulon and Roman Cointment for an extended remodeling of the auditorium and stage of the building. The floor was raised, "putting it on a suitable incline"; a gallery, supported by iron columns, was added to provide additional seating space; a complete set of new scenery was added by Frank Cox, a New Orleans scenic artist employed to design and paint the sets; and the whole interior was redecorated and painted under the direction of Joseph A. Troné. In July three hundred "opera house" chairs were installed. The new equipment and the remodeling work cost Thibodaux Fire Company No. 1 and Home Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, joint owners of the theater, approximately \$2700. The amount was borrowed, and added to the existing indebtedness of about \$1000, placed the overall debt on the companies of \$3700 when the theater was reopened in July, 1892.⁸⁸

Thibodaux College, St. Valerie School, and Mont Carmel Convent, Catholic schools in Thibodaux, presented a joint program of one-act plays at St. Joseph's Hall on May 29, 1892, the single theatrical program in Thibodaux during the period that Fireman's Hall was closed. The completion of the Thibodaux Opera House, the name given the theater when it reopened, motivated a noticeable revival of interest in local productions. Joseph A. Troné directed a two-evening production of Hick'ry Farm which inaugurated the new theater on July 16 and 17. For the cast the veteran amateur director drew from experienced actors of Thibodaux Arthur E. Hoffman, Julius Blum, Earle Knoblock, Charles W. Thibodaux, Louis J. and Alice Troné, Philip J. Aucoin, and Louise Munch. The newly organized Home Circle Orchestra provided music both evenings and shared with the

⁸⁸Ibid., July 14, 1892

volunteer fire companies the benefits of the productions. Clay Knobloch, former state Lieutenant Governor from Lafourche Parish,⁸⁹ addressed the theater audience to open the program. The speaker complimented the committee upon the improvements made in the theater. He spoke on the value of the theater in supporting "morality and education," and closed his address by entreating the people "to lend their support to the maintenance of this new enterprise. . . ."⁹⁰ Special mention was made of the acting and directing of the performance in the review published in the same issue of the weekly.

. . . The rendition of this play earned well deserved praise for the entire cast, and the young actors acquitted themselves in a manner which brought forth well merited applause from the large audience. Each and everyone in the cast deserve mention not only because of the total freedom from that rant which too frequently mars the amateur performance, but also for the repose and dignity they gave their interpretations throughout the play. Mr. Jos. A. Troné, under whose leadership the play was rehearsed, also deserves special mention for his able management. . . .

Two clubs held organizational meetings in Thibodaux on July 17, 1892. The Parthenon Club, composed of a small group of older residents, proposed giving programs of readings and recitations for the mutual entertainment and cultural development of its members. Judge A. F. Knobloch was president of the club; Thomas A. Badeaux, critic, W. E. Knobloch, vice president; Albert L. Guillot, treasurer, and John B. Taylor, secretary. Among the members were F. J. Celestin, Thomas McCulla, H. C. Chol, Edward Blanchard, Charles Coulon, and Klebert Bruad. Initially the group planned to hold its meetings in the rooms of Albert Guillot with the

⁸⁹ Clay Knobloch served as Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana from 1862 - 1866.

⁹⁰ Sentinel, July 23, 1892.

prospect of later joining with the Home Circle Orchestra in occupying the Catholic Knight's Hall at the corner of St. Bridget and Green Streets.⁹¹ Programs of the Parthenon Reading Club were evidently planned for its members only, and public announcements of its activities did not appear in the weekly papers. Among its members, however, were those who were also members of a literary club sponsored by the local branch of Catholic Knights of America. The Catholic Knight's club frequently presented public programs of "recitations, lectures, and music" at their hall. On the program for a reunion entertainment on January 27, 1893, for example, members of the Parthenon Club participated:

. . . The recitations were: "The Women of Rumble's Head," by Hon. H. N. Coulon; "Asleep at the Switch," by Judge A. F. Knobloch, and "The Shadow on the Wall," by Mr. H. C. Chol. Highly instructive papers were read by Judge L. P. Caillonet and Hon. Thos. A. Badeaux. . .⁹²

The second organizational meeting held July 17, 1892, was that of a social club, The Men of Mirth. Earlier in the year a group of younger men of Thibodaux had formed the club with Louis J. Troné serving as the group's first president. New officers, usually designated, were elected at this meeting:

. . . C. E. Thibodaux, past Grand Protector and Treasurer; P. J. Aucoin, Grand Protector; Chas. Flasch, Vice Grand Protector; Arthur Hoffman, Master Protector, Louis Schneider, Inner Protector; Thos. Pierson, Outside Protector; Louis Enerran, Secretary.

The new officers, after being installed by retiring past Grand Master Louis J. Troné, invited the members to partake of a sumptuous repast, during which toasts were offered in behalf of the new Officers, The Ladies, The

⁹¹Thibodaux Comet, July 21, 1892.

⁹²Sentinel, February 4, 1893.

Friends and Brothers of the association. . . .⁹³

Previous activities of the Men of Mirth had been social. A ball sponsored by the group at the new theater on July 6 was possibly the first entertainment given in the Opera House. A number of the members of the club, however, had appeared in the cast of J. A. Troné's production of Hick'ry Farm. Immediately they proposed that the Men of Mirth include occasional theatrical productions among the club's activities. Consequently, in November Strife, "a portrayal of the capers and peculiarities of capital and labor. . . ." was put in rehearsal with production date set for December 29. The time between Christmas and New Year, the club announced, was selected in order to give a chance to everybody to enjoy the play." The Men of Mirth membership provided a cast of experienced actors, for the most part, with Arthur E. Hoffman, Philip J. Aucoin, Charles W. Thibodeaux, and Julius Blum taking the heavier roles. W. P. Martin, Walter Regan, Thomas Pierson, Charles Flasch, Laura Legarde, Mary Roth and Mamie Thibodeaux completed the cast. On the following January 25 the play was repeated for the benefit of the Home Circle Orchestra, at which time original compositions by the aging Thibodeaux music teacher Emanuel Chou were played.⁹⁴

On January 12 and 13, 1893, the Troné Bros.' Moral and Refined Theater made its début in Thibodeaux. Albert J. and Louis J. Troné, the two active amateurs in Thibodeaux theater during the last few years, formed a small company of actors, purchased and equipped a boat, and set out on

⁹³Comet, July 21, 1892.

⁹⁴Ibid., February 2, 1893.

a proposed itinerary of small communities along Bayou Lafourche, the Lower Mississippi River, and Bayou Teche. Both Albert and Louis were acting members of the Troné family troupe that toured among the small towns of the Bayou Country in 1886. Other members of the present troupe have not been indentified; however, the Moral and Refined Theatre advertised a regular admission charge of twenty-five cents, indicating their bills were not exceedingly elaborate. During the remainder of January the troupe played to communities to the south along the Lafourche, and returned to Thibodaux for a single performance on February 2 before continuing north to the Mississippi River.⁹⁵

This last exhibition of the Troné Brothers, a band concert by the Home Circle Orchestra at Catholic Knight's Hall on May 11, a tournament and grand ball by the Men of Mirth a month later, and a two-evening musical benefit program in tribute to Professor Emanuel Chol on July 29 and 30, concluded non-professional theatrical activities in Thibodaux during 1893.

In May, 1894, the Men of Mirth secured the services of John A. Mellon, a professional actor, to direct the club in a series of performances during the summer months. Between May 16 and September 13, the group gave ten performances. The six plays included in the summer repertoire of the club were currently being played in professional theaters. The club opened with Shadow of a Great City on the evening of May 16, at the opera house. A matinee of the same play was given on May 27, and the troupe moved to Phelps' Opera House in Napoleonville for a performance on June 5. Single performances of The Noble Outcast and East Lynne were

⁹⁵ Ibid., December 22, 1892; January 19, February 9, 1893.

given in Thibodaux on June 16 and 27 respectively. The June 16 program was a benefit performance in connection with the fire company fair. Then followed on July 5 and 19 productions of Private Secretary and Uncle Josh. Kathleen, or The Pride of Kildare was played on August 7, and the club repeated Private Secretary in Thibodaux on August 27 and in Houma on September 13 as benefit performances for the director, John A. Mellon.

In the cast of Shadows of a Great City, the first play of the summer series, W. P. Martin, Earle Knobloch, and Philip J. Aucoin were the featured amateurs. In the minor roles were Braud, Legarde, Pierson, Engerran, Roberts, Gianelloni, Mellon, Irene DeForest, and Carrie Newcomb. For the later productions casts were not given. Names appearing most frequently, however, in the short comments in the weekly newspapers were Martin, Aucoin, and Knobloch. Mellon and Irene DeForest, the professional members of the group, consistently worked in bit parts, the exception being the director's playing the title role in Uncle Josh, the fifth play in the series. Louis J. Troné, popularly referred to as "Beb," and Mamie Thibodeaux also joined the troupe for the Uncle Josh production. Both the Sentinel and the Comet editors pointed to the noticeable improvement of the Men of Mirth troupe in their successive performances. On July 21 the Sentinel commented that the comedy of Uncle Josh, the New England Farmer was

. . . admirably well played by the Men of Mirth ably assisted by Mr. J. A. Mellon who impersonated Uncle Josh, and Miss Irene DeForest to a good and appreciative house. Every character was well represented and each one played well his part. . . . The young amateur actors are making marked progress, and will turn out some excellent performances. . . .

In a similar complimentary vein the Comet praised the work of the club as a whole in announcing the benefit performance for the director and his

wife, possibly the Irene DeForest of the casts.

On next Monday night, August 27th, Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Mellon will make their farewell appearance in Thibodaux, at the Opera House, on which occasion the Men of Mirth and the citizens of this town will tender them a complimentary benefit. The play selected is The Private Secretary, that bright sparkling comedy that made a hit here last July during the meeting of the teacher's institute. . . . We trust that all our theater-goers who have been entertained and amused during the past four months will be present at this performance to bid Mr. Mellon and his wife goodbye and a hearty Godspeed. Mr. Mellon is deserving of this benefit as by his untiring efforts, he has brought the Men of Mirth to such perfection that we have now without exception the best amateur dramatic organization in the state of Louisiana. . . .⁹⁶

Theater attendance was generally good during the series. Admission price to the matinee performance of Shadows of a Great City on May 27 and to The Noble Outcast on June 16 was twenty-five cents for adults and fifteen cents for children. On both occasions the theater was crowded. Rates at other productions were not recorded; however, prior to the Uncle Josh performance in July the Sentinel revealingly commented that "the great success which attended the Private Secretary has shown that our people like comedy in preference to more serious plays, and the Men of Mirth have determined to cater to their taste." The later performance of Private Secretary was not well attended, indicating perhaps that Thibodaux audiences heartily responded to a first performance of a comedy, but considered a second time as being unrewarding. This lack of financial success at the repeat performance, the benefit of the director, probably made necessary the September 13 performance of "one of their plays" by the club in Houma in order to meet necessary monetary obligations.

From the point of view of summer theater the Men of Mirth were

⁹⁶ Ibid., August 23, 1894.

entirely successful. As summed up by the Gonet editor in the August 23 issue,

. . . Since last May the Men of Mirth have produced several plays to none of which the most fastidious could object on the point of morals or excellence, indeed many of their performances would have done credit to a professional company. This is a record to be proud of. . . .

In December John A. Mellon was again in Thibodaux to direct a variety program for the benefit of the Home Circle Orchestra. The performance was planned to take place on December 27. The December 20 issue of the Gonet, carrying incomplete details of the proposed entertainment listed among the performers Philip J. Aucion, Charles Thibodeaux, Omer Patureau, Dr. Burton, Marie Knobloch, J. N. Thibodeaux, and a group of twenty-six young ladies. A week later the same weekly published an invitation to citizens of Thibodaux from the Enterprising Social and Dramatic Club of Melodia Plantation to attend a program to be held at the Plantation on December 30. Reviews of neither of these programs are preserved. The plantation community club, not unusual of its kind, was probably more than a single performance organization, though reports of its activities did not appear in the Thibodaux weeklies.

During 1895 only a two-day band festival and fair was reported. H. W. Tabor was general manager of the program in which the Hallier Brass Band of Houma, The Bertie Band of Assumption Parish, the R. E. Lee Band of Pugh, the St. Charles Band from Lafourche Crossing, and the Thibodaux Band "alternately regaled the surging crowds." The festival, projected for the benefit of the host band, netted the organization approximately \$500.⁹⁷ At the beginning of the new year Albert and Louis

⁹⁷Sentinel, August 10, 1895.

Trone organized a troupe of "home people" designated as the Trone Bros.¹ Acrobatic and Variety Show for a third theatrical venture in the Bayou Country. The new troupe gave its first performance at Thibodaux on January 4, following on January 5 with matinee and evening performances. Admission price was twenty cents; however, cold weather caused the attendance to be small. General satisfaction at the variety performances was expressed by the home audience. During the following week the management of the company cancelled all engagements of the troupe, giving as the cause of the action, as published in the Conat on January 9:

. . . Some of the actors whom they had engaged disappointed them by not coming, and they now have only 9 actors while they were to have 22. They want to give a good show or none at all.

Few notices of non-professional activities appeared during the following months as the Opera House was consistently used by touring professional troupes. A grand fair was announced for the benefit of the fire companies at the Thibodaux Opera House grounds on April 18 and 19. Usually amateur dramatic performances formed a part of the fair activities; even so, published details of the firemen's fair were too meagre to reveal the type of entertainment being planned. On May 26 Mrs. J. Bontarie scheduled a "performance or entertainment" at the Opera House for the benefit of a monument fund honoring the late Rev. Charles Menard, Catholic minister and educator in Thibodaux for more than twenty years. And Mont Carmel Convent held commencement exercises in the Opera House on June 20, the variety program consisting in recitations, music, a humorous cantata entitled Rebellion of the Daisies, a wand drill, and Olga, ex Out of the Shadows, a drama with a cast of fifteen girls.⁹⁸ During the first week

⁹⁸Ibid., July 4, 1896.

in October the Thibodaux Minstrels, an "organization made up of young colored men of the town," gave two performances. Attendance was small, according to the October 8 issue of the Comet. "but we are told that they rendered quite a creditable program. It is said that with proper training they could present as good a performance as do a number of the travelling troupes."

A committee composed of E. J. Legendre, Albert J. Trone, K. J. Brou, P. J. Auccin, and A. J. Brand leased the Opera House from the fire companies for one year beginning December 1, 1896. Trone, experienced in theater management, was leader of the committee. The group arranged with the Home Circle Orchestra to furnish "music for the overtures and intermissions of the performances"; they improved the gallery by having the seats "arranged in elevated tiers, affording seating room for 200 persons" increasing the total seats to 700. The Comet for December 24 reported further that the dressing rooms had been enlarged, the stage improved, and "this week a gas machine is being put in to light up the stage." With the former leaders of the amateur performances thus employed in bringing to Thibodaux better professional entertainment, non-professional activity lapsed completely until April, 1898, when Louis J. Trone organized the Thibodaux Dramatic Club. The group presented Married for Money at the Opera House on April 21, and the performance was followed by a dance making the club's debut both a financial and social success. Philip J. Auccin and Louis Trone headed the cast which included a number of names now among Thibodaux amateurs: Margaret and Virginia Dwyer, Camille Monin, Arthur Tetreau, and S. L. Bergeron. Originally, the dramatic club planned to take the play on tour of neighboring towns; however, no record of subsequent performances by the group has been found. In December the

Orange Blossom Social Club, a women's group, sponsored a variety program for the benefit of the Opera House. Tableaux, music, and recitations composed the program, and about fifty dollars net profit was given the beneficiary. The Orange Blossom Club assisted by a number of young men, gave a performance of Dearer Than Life on the following May 9 to further assist the finances of the Opera House Management. J. A. O. Coignet, Auguste Robichaux, Philip J. Ancoia, F. L. Knobloch, C. A. Badesaux, Cecile Robichaux, Vivian Knobloch, Bertha Maquin, Alice Capella, Eugene Coulon, Delma Cointment, and Laura Badesaux acted in the play. The entertainment closed with a cake walk, adding to the general jubilation of the occasion and to the total receipts for the Opera House Fund, but little to the excellence of the performance described as "both the play and its characterization were gratifying to the audience."⁹⁹

Late in August the Opera House was wired for electric lighting. The management announced that "strong attractions" were being secured for the coming season. Appropriate enough then was the Orange Blossom Club's scheduled performance of "songs, recitations, drills, dances and living pictures" on November 15 for the benefit of the Thibodaux Fire Company, owners of the Opera House.

Thus it may be said that financial obligations incurred by Thibodaux's consistent effort to provide a theater sufficiently well equipped to attract to the town the better commercial companies during the last two decades of the nineteenth century in no small degree provided the motivation for an active non-professional theater. Community planned, directed, and produced entertainments continued to be a seemingly necessary

⁹⁹Const. May 11, 1899.

part of the social life of Thibodaux, as the Evergreen Dramatic Club, the Men of Mirth, and The Home Circle Orchestra and the numerous other more temporary clubs provided opportunity for young people to participate in public performances.

Miscellaneous Communities

From reports of correspondents to the Thibodaux and Napoleonville weekly newspapers and from occasional acknowledgments of complimentary tickets to performances by dramatic clubs in Houma, Labadieville, Lockport, and Plattenville by the editors sufficient information is preserved to suggest the extent of non-professional theater in those communities during the closing decades of the century. In Houma amateur dramatic entertainments were probably comparable to those of Thibodaux or Napoleonville during the corresponding period. As early as 1869 the Thibodaux Sentinel reported a program of "Living Tableaux" to be given by the Houma Academy for the benefit of the Catholic Church on January 22. The Crisp Family revealed upon their arrival in Thibodaux in August, 1872, that they had just completed "a successful week at Houma,"¹⁰⁰ and a correspondent who signed "OLIO" reported in the April 14, 1877, issue of the Sentinel that the Helen D'Este Company were performing nightly since April 8. The troupe was being quartered at the Berger Hotel, and their performances were being "liberally patronized." On June 30, the same year, the pupils of the Catholic Convent gave public performances of school plays entitled Playing School and Boarding School Accomplishments, and a month later the Houma Brass Band under the direction of Dr. Blanchard was assisted

¹⁰⁰Thibodaux Sentinel, August 17, 1872.

by Mrs. Valentine Barger in a children's tableaux program at Canal Balanger.¹⁰¹

The earliest organized theater group in Houma was the Houma Dramatic Club, which on July 10, 1884, presented Lady Audley's Secret and a farce entitled Turn Him Out. By 1886 the Houma volunteer fire department had equipped their hall for theatrical programs, and the Houma Dramatics gave a performance there on January 8.¹⁰² L. C. Moise, a Houma attorney and leading member of the Houma Dramatic Association in 1894, wrote for the club an original four-act comedy entitled Curiosity. On November 16 the club performed at the Thibodaux Opera House, of which production the Comet editor reported:

. . . Some of its parts are highly creditable. The Houma Dramatic Association who are amateurs, rendered Curiosity in a manner that elicited much praise for them, and they deserve much more than the small audience that greeted them. All the performers are good. . . .

The author of the play directed the production and appeared in the cast which included H. M. Bourg, J. C. Briant, John Kleiner, Paul Dupont, A. Fenmay, A. Sespit, P. Cameron, M. Daspit, Lelia Daigle, Rosa Blum, and Aline Bergeron.¹⁰³ Only two other productions by the Houma amateurs were reported in the Thibodaux weeklies. The first was Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta H. M. S. Pinafore, directed by Mrs. W. J. Chapman and produced in April, 1897, for the benefit of the Houma Opera House building fund. The other was a two-evening production by the Houma Dramatic Company of Oliver Cromwell, an original drama by L. C. Moise. The play was given

¹⁰¹ Ibid., July 28, 1877.

¹⁰² Ibid., January 9, 1886.

¹⁰³ Comet, November 15, 1894.

during the first week in November, 1899, and the review described the play and the performance as successful.¹⁰⁴

At Labadieville some eight miles north of Thibodaux in 1875 the citizens organized a French dramatic club called Cercle Joyeux of Labadieville. Local political conditions in Assumption Parish during the late Reconstruction period motivated L. Francioni, a member of the club, to write an original burlesque in two acts entitled La Sixième Cour de Justice. The play was first produced in Labadieville on September 12. A few weeks later on October 20, a second performance was given at Waverley Hall in Thibodaux.¹⁰⁵ On January 30, 1876, the dramatic club performed for the benefit of St. Philomene Church of Labadieville. The plays were Niais de Salerne and L'Avocat Patelin. Later productions recorded in Labadieville were school plays by the pupils of the Convent of St. Philomene. On July 26, 1886, an audience of more than five hundred crowded the school hall to see productions of Martyre de Ste-Philomene and The Reverse of the Medal. The following spring the school commencement plays were Brascliff Hall, or Two Days Spent with a Great Aunt and Marie, or À la Grace de Dieu.

The need for a public school building prompted the citizens of Lockport to begin a series of entertainments in 1881. On April 23 and 24 the first of the fairs and dramatic programs was scheduled. During the afternoons the fair booths provided entertainment; during the evenings programs of tableaux, lantern drills, and music were presented. On September 1 the second of the series was scheduled, with Charles S. Larkin, a

¹⁰⁴Houma Courier, quoted by Thibodaux Sentinel, November 11, 1899.

¹⁰⁵Sentinel, September 18, October 23, 1875.

former Thibodaux resident and amateur performer, directing the production. By June the following year the group had organized a dramatic club known as the Pleasure Seekers Variety Club. The new club gave its initial performances on June 3 and 4, and the Lockport Brass Band provided music. The fair and dramatic performances netted \$508 for the Lockport Public School Association.¹⁰⁶

In 1886 the Lockport Dramtic Club was being directed by Joseph A. Trone, the former Thibodaux teacher. On February 27 the club appeared at Firemen's Hall in Thibodaux in Tempter, or The Sailor's Return, and D'Ye Know Me Now. Reviewing the performance the Sentinel pointed out the capable acting done by Alice Trone and reported further that

. . . This club proposes to visit several points in Terrebonne, Assumption and Lafourche (parishes) and we can assure our readers that but few amateur performers can equal them, and that they are superior to many wandering actors that are perambulating over the country. Mr. J. A. Trone is at the head of the club.¹⁰⁷

The club again played in Thibodaux for the benefit of the volunteer fire company on June 27. On that occasion it appeared under the name of The Troné Family. Late in August, 1887, director Troné traveled from Lockport on the steamer Sallie B, to Grand Isle, Cheniere, and other places "with a view of giving several of their fine concerts." Following their tour the Troné Family again became active in non-professional theatrical activities in Thibodaux. Hence it was not until J. L. Rusca reorganized the Lockport Dramatic Club in March, 1897, that amateur performances were again reported to the Sentinel. Working with the Lockport

¹⁰⁶Ibid., June 24, 1882.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., March 6, 1886.

Brass Band, the new dramatic club began on May 23 a series of performances designed to provide needed funds for the public schools.¹⁰⁸

For a brief time between 1886 and 1891 dramatic activities of the Plattenville dramatic clubs were reported in the Pioneer of Assumption, the Napoleonville weekly. The first club reported was organized by A. A. Aucoin, a Plattenville physician, who served as club president and stage manager. Designated as the Plattenville Charitable Dramatic Club, the organization consisted of "some twenty odd members" and proposed to give entertainments "for all charitable purposes." L. A. Flandry was vice president; Leo Guillot, treasurer; John Marks, secretary; E. L. Guillot, chairman of committee on arrangements; and Walter Guion, chairman of reception committee.¹⁰⁹ In June 1887, the club inaugurated the new Firemen's Hall of Plattenville, presenting an unnamed three-act play. Reviewing the performance in the June 11 issue the Pioneer editor wrote:

. . . At night a drama in three acts was given in the newly erected hall. The acting was very good, and we were particularly struck with the admirable adaptation of the French character to the acting of plays. It looked as if persons in real life were talking together--there was nothing overstrained, the jesticulation [sic] was easy, natural, and the movements graceful. . . The gentlemen were clever and natural, and the ladies beautifully dressed au fait in their respective characters. . . .

At a fair for the benefit of the Plattenville schools on July 27 and 28, 1890, the amateur group appeared in Le Pari, a farce, on the first evening, and Le Joueur, ou les Deux Frères the following evening. In the cast were John Marks, A. V. Pintado, John Cabrol, Dr. A. A. Aucoin,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., March 20, May 8, 29, 1897.

¹⁰⁹ Napoleonville Pioneer, September 4, 1886.

Omea and Emile Templet, Amilcar Melancon, Ernest Guillot, Alcee and Alcide Auccin, and Louis Verret.¹¹⁰ A. V. Pintado was working in the productions of the Painscourtville dramatic club during this time. John Marks later appeared in plays in Napoleonville. Only one other performance was reported. For the benefit of the public school, programs were scheduled on April 25 and 26, 1891. The first evening's entertainment was to consist of a concert ". . . by girls of the school. The following evening's program was to be provided by an "amateur troupe."

BAYOU TEGHE

Abbeville

In Abbeville, the Vermillion parish seat, the people who participated in community entertainments were never quite successful in forming an organized theater group during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Three community organizations, active at different times during the period, sponsored dramatic productions which provided the town with theatrical activity comparable to that in the other communities along Bayou Teche. The French Benevolent Society, during the early 1880's; the Voluntary Fire Company, organized in 1882; and the Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Church, after 1885, used community theater as a means of financing their work.

On April 4, 1880, the French Benevolent Society gave a benefit performance consisting of French and English plays and music by the band and the Abbeville Glee Club. Scanterbine, and La Affaire de la Rue de L'Lucine were the plays with Armand Monlor, an experienced amateur performer leading the casts. Joseph T. Labit, later a director,

¹¹⁰Ibid., August 9, 1890.

J. M. Beauris, Eleonore Bernard and Joseph Mouilland were other actors listed in the review. The glee club, an important organization in Abbeville during the following years, was introduced to the public between plays of the April 4 program, singing Les Hirondelles. The performances were given at the parish courthouse, which had served the community as a theater during the closing years of the Reconstruction Period.¹¹¹

In the fall The French Benevolent Society completed their public hall, the first performances being scheduled during the benefit fair on October 17 and 18. The following June, on the 6th and 7th, the Catholic Church sponsored benefit concerts at which, according to their announcement in the local paper on June 4, "many comedies will be represented by the young ladies and gentlemen of Abbeville." The Abbeville Glee Club was again scheduled to perform. Details of these performances were not reviewed in the Meridional; nevertheless, the editor a month later proposed the organization of a theater group in Abbeville. His editorial, captioned "A SUGGESTION," began:

The question, "Why don't the young gentlemen and ladies of Abbeville organize a social club or association and give theatrical representations and other entertainments, is one that has often arisen in our mind. Most every other town has its merry makers, social circle or some such society, and why should not we?"

.....
The Editor of this paper would be glad to see some steps taken in this matter and would give all the encouragement possible. That such associations, having for their object theatrical representation and tableaux, musical entertainments and other social enjoyments, are beneficial, is not an open question for debate. Their elevating, educating and refining influence, when properly managed

¹¹¹ Abbeville Meridional, April 10, 1880.

and conducted is manifest and is sensibly felt in any community. Such social organizations are indicative of the mental status and progress of a community; because they are dependant upon the intelligence of the patronising audience, as well as upon the ability and training of the members, for their inception and duration. Judging from performances heretofore given on various occasions we are satisfied that the young ladies and gentlemen here who would do themselves credit, should they resolve and determine to organize a society as suggested, and faithfully strive to carry out its aims and objects. . . .¹¹²

No response to the editor's suggestion was reported. On the other hand, the young people of Abbeville continued their occasional performances for purposes of charity. In March, 1882, the volunteer fire company was chartered. Like other fire departments in small Louisiana towns, the Abbeville company in the first article of its charter pledged itself to protect from fire all property within the corporate limits of the town, ". . . And to aid and assist the present incorporators and their future co-laborers in works of mutual benevolence and charity."¹¹³ Joseph T. Labit served as the first president of the fire company, and on August 24 he directed the Abbeville amateurs' production of War to the Knife as a fire company benefit. There were new names in the cast, many of the charter members of the newly formed company taking roles in the play. W. B. White, a consistent performer during later years; and Elijah Wise--the son of Solomon Wise, a prominent Abbeville business man, and the town's most successful comedian--appeared for the first time on the stage in this cast. R. C. Smedes, W. P. Miller, Emile Bennan, Julia Lyons and Misses H. Mouton, E. Bernard,

¹¹²Ibid., July 23, 1881.

¹¹³Ibid., March 11, 1882.

and S. Beer completed the group. J. J. Abadie directed the band. French Hall was packed to capacity for the performance, and the acting, according to flattering comments of the Meridional editor, ". . . was a complete success and such. . . as was never witnessed in Abbeville"

A professional troupe played three nights at French Hall during the last week in September, 1882. It was not until May 31, 1883, that the Abbeville amateurs again performed. The plays were not named in the editorial paragraph, which simply stated that "there was given by the amateurs of Abbeville a series of performances, which were a great success, in the theatrical line. . . ." ¹¹⁴ In September the fire company sponsored an entertainment described as a "panorama" and a ball for their benefit. Two weeks latter Eli Solomon rented French Hall, proposing to give a series of ten balls, which were to take place at "reasonable" intervals. During the Christmas holidays the Catholic Church sponsored a Bazaar and dramatic program which included the French play L'Anglais Mal Servi and the English play Patronage. In the former Monlor, Abadie, Laborde, Hubert and Pery (possibly Perry) were the actors, while Eli Wise, R. C. Smedes, Eleonore Bernard, Lelia Lyons, Olive Broussard, and Abadie formed the cast for the English play. The entertainments and the fair netted \$1160 for the sponsoring Catholic Church ¹¹⁵

No performances by either the community amateur group or by professional companies in Abbeville were reported during 1884; however, since no specific cause for activities being suspended during that time

¹¹⁴ Ibid., June 2, 1883.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., December 29, 1883; January 5, 1884.

is known, it may be assumed that the entertainments were simply not reported. Moreover, during the following year the non-professional theater was active with five productions.

On January 17, 1885, a number of experienced amateurs with several beginners gave a satisfactory performance of Ten Nights in a Bar Room. The play was given for no announced benefit; evidently it was one of the few Abbeville productions which were presented by a group of actors for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from doing the play. Mr. and Mrs. W. B. White and Eli Wise led the cast, and Walter White directed the series of tableaux presented during the course of the performance. Frank Lyons and Mrs. Hattie Sokoloski, newcomers to the amateur stage in Abbeville, did the roles of Romaine and Mrs. Morgan, respectively. According to the comments of a correspondent to the local weekly, the cast which included Ernest Lyons, R. P. O'Bryan, J. O. Kibbe, Moses Fisher, and Miss M. J. White, who did the role of the waif Mary Morgan, did surprisingly well with their characterizations. W. B. White as Joe Morgan and Eli Wise as Sample Switchel were commended for their performances. From this role Eli Wise began building his reputation as a comedian in the community.

A month later, on February 14 and 15, the pupils of the Catholic school presented French plays. On the first evening De Chatillon Tragedy, an original play by Mrs. Felicia Hemans-- presumably a resident of Abbeville--was given its initial performance, though the play had been "printed in 1841." Of the production the Meridional commented that ". . . the costumes were grand, and beneath the gas lights, by far surpassed in grandeur and splendor any that has ever yet appeared on the Abbeville stages." On the following evening the play was the French drama Yvonne,

ou La Malédiction D'une Mère.¹¹⁶

The Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Church of Abbeville sponsored a repeat performance of Ten Nights in a Bar Room at French Hall. Essentially the same cast that appeared in the January production worked in the play; however, the reviewer was less complimentary following this performance.

. . . While the representation was like all amateur efforts, the natural victim of lengthy "stage waits" and a lack of appreciation for the depth and force of smooth and unpretentious passages, it was when properly considered a very acceptable piece of acting, and fully deserving of the praises lavishly bestowed by the spectators. . . .¹¹⁷

Again in December, during Christmas week, the Covent Sisters conducted a bazaar and dramatic program for the benefit of the school. On December 26 members of the amateur acting corps of Abbeville presented Lady Audley's Secret with Lelia Lyons in the role of Lady Audley. The following evening the pupils of the school gave a religious play entitled Marie La Grâce de Dieu. The Convent hall was used as theater; and the audiences were large for both performances, the receipts being reported as "about six hundred dollars."¹¹⁸

Early in January, 1886, an attempt was made to organize the Abbeville Literary Society. By the first week in March the group had enrolled thirty-seven prospective members. A final organizational meeting was announced for March 23, at which time the club was to adopt its constitution and elect officers. Although no details of the club's activity

¹¹⁶Ibid., February 21, 1885.

¹¹⁷Ibid., April 25, 1885.

¹¹⁸Ibid., January 2, 1886.

are known, the Literary Society probably provided entertainment for the community during the year. It was not until December 24 that the amateurs again appeared at French Hall. The program consisted of two one-act plays: Matrimony and Masquerade. W. B. White, Eli Wise, Mrs. Hattie Sokolski, Lelia Lyons, and Moses Fisher were the experienced actors among the group. Adonis Leblanc, M. T. Gordy, Ida Neal, Mary Lou Kibbe, Miss M. C. Winston, Neomie Leblanc, Lizzie Edwards, and C. C. Roberts completed the casts. On December 27 the group repeated the performances at Covent Hall for the school benefit.¹¹⁹

Non-professional productions grew less frequent in Abbeville during the following years. In April, 1887, F. F. Feray leased French Hall and redecorated it ". . . to accommodate the pleasure-seekers. . . " of the village and with a view to attracting to Abbeville a greater number of touring commercial theater companies. Two amateur programs were given during 1887; and only one, a benefit for the fire company, was recorded in 1888.

A program of vocal and instrumental concert was announced for June 26. August Cavailhes of Bayou Tigre, a neighboring community, was to direct the program for the benefit of the Bayou Tigre Catholic Chapel. Mont Carmel Convent's commencement exercises at the school Hall on July 23 included student productions of The Reverse of the Medal, Jeanneton, Rien sans Peine, and The Bohemians, or Gratitude.¹²⁰ The Jeanerette Dramatic Society was scheduled to visit French Hall in Abbeville for a program to include an English and a French play on October 16, the

¹¹⁹Ibid., January 1, 1887.

¹²⁰Ibid., July 23, 30, 1887.

final performance announced until December 24 and 25, 1888.

Abbeville's volunteer fire company sponsored the December productions. Four plays were presented, the first evening's program including a three-act play, Everybody's Friend, and My Neighbor's Wife, a farce. A French play, Jacques Godiche, was given on the following evening. Again the following April the firemen gave a dramatic benefit at French Hall. The play was not named in the brief review which observed:

The theatrical performance. . . was quite a success, both financially and artistically. The performers, each and every one, acted their part in a most satisfactory manner. . . .¹²¹

A professional troupe, known as the Peck's Bad Boy Company for its feature play, performed at French Hall on December 13 and gave a matinee and evening performance on the following day. Also for the Christmas week entertainment, the fire company sponsored two groups of entertainers. One, the newly formed minstrel troupe, gave a program at Perry's Bridge on December 25 and returned to French Hall for a performance on New Year's Eve. The second group of Abbeville, performing for the benefit of the fire company, presented The Social Glass, a temperance play, at French Hall on Christmas night.¹²²

During 1890 amusements in Abbeville were provided by professional entertainers. On January 25 Clark Brothers' Royal Circus performed. A "very large audience," attended the performance, according to the local editor whose one-sentence evaluation of the show was, "They are fakes, and only fit for canibal [sic] hash." A medicine show provided

¹²¹Ibid., May 4, 1889.

¹²²Ibid., December 28, 1889.

lectures and variety entertainment during the last weeks of January and the first half of February. Dr. Chisholm's lectures served as amusement as well as an introduction of "the al-fal-fa remedies," to the citizens of Abbeville and the surrounding communities. Mr. and Mrs. Wallace, performers with the medicine show, gave regular performances which were described as ". . . mirthful and spicy entertainments. . . ." ¹²³

On February 10 and 11 the Wallace dramatic team performed at French Hall for the benefit of the fire company. They gave a "grand concert" at Peray's Hall in Perry Bridge on February 15, and the show left Abbeville on the 17 for Lafayette.

Abbeville amateurs provided community entertainments for the benefit of the Ladies Aid Society with single productions during each of the next three years. On April 28, 1891, their performance in The Light of Other Days was ". . . received with raptuous [sic] applause." For the patrons of their school the students of Mont Carmel Convent presented Gifts of the Fairy Queen, Unjust Suspicion, and Strategy as commencement plays on July 2. In December the Ladies Aid Society arranged a program of "recitations in Costume, Music and Tableaux. . . ." And on the 24 and 25 at Convent Hall the school presented a special benefit program including "several plays both in French and English, together with Tableaux and Calisthenic exercises." Admission to the school program was fifty cents, and refreshments were served ". . . at reasonable rates." The program was directed by the Convent Sisters and Dora Lyons, Georgia Labit, Eugenie Young, Lucie Leblanc, and Onesia

¹²³Ibid., February 8, 1890.

Broussard were commended for their performances.¹²⁴

In February, 1893, The Ladies Aid Society sponsored a production of the melodrama Ben Bolt. Mr. and Mrs. W. B. White directed and acted in the play, which proved to be one of the outstanding amateur presentations during the period. The performance moved smoothly, the usual "delays" for changes of scenes were eliminated, and the actors were well rehearsed in their roles. The Meridional editor's comments were much more detailed than they had been for previous plays.

THE MELO-DRAMA

Despite the inclement weather, there were gathered at the French Hall last Saturday night, a large house of people to see Ben Bolt. At 8 o'clock the curtain rose on the first scene, and thereafter, without the usual delay attending amateur performances for the shifting of scenery etc., and in a thorough and pleasing manner was presented the ensuing parts.

The play was better staged, perhaps, than any yet presented in Abbeville. The scenery was tasty [sic] and beautiful, and as effective as the dimensions [sic] of the stage permitted.

Each player knew his part well, and the whole moved on without the slightest noticeable hitch.

The singing was especially well executed and was a feature of the drama.

We consider however that the play itself lacked force. With its personae and the thoroughness of their interest, we think it should have been more absorbing or attractive.

Be the play what it may, Mr. and Mrs. W. B. White deserve much credit for the success they made of it.¹²⁵

Ben Bolt was repeated on February 11, and in April an unidentified charitable organization sponsored a ball at French Hall, the first of the season and the last reported community-sponsored entertainment in Abbeville for more than three years.

¹²⁴Ibid., December 17, 13, 1892.

¹²⁵Ibid., February 11, 1893.

Professional companies played in Abbeville more frequently after 1893. Notices of the Arlington Minstrels appeared in January, 1894; and in March the Maude Atkinson Company played a week's engagement. During January, 1895, the Georgia Minstrels with the famous Billy Hersends of Donaldsonville appeared for performances and were followed by the Emma Warren Company two weeks later.

For the Christmas holiday season the pupils of the Convent presented programs at the Convent Hall on December 25 and 26, 1895. Music, drills, a scarf dance, and an unnamed English play made up the program of the entertainment. Emma Warren was again in Abbeville for performances on January 11 through 18, 1896. The Coleman Comedy Company followed for three days on January 23 through 25, and The Warren Company returned for a single program on January 27.

Early the following year the public school of Abbeville was beneficiary of an amateur production of Dot, The Miner's Daughter. Professor Rite, the Abbeville music teacher, directed the production at French Hall on January 23. In December the young men of Abbeville organized the Elite Minstrel Company. Assisted by the Abbeville orchestra, the troupe performed at French Hall on December 18, and were scheduled to appear at Erath, a neighboring community, on January 8, 1898.¹²⁶

The minstrel programs began a series of locally sponsored entertainments given in Abbeville during 1898. On February 1

¹²⁶ Ibid., December 11, 25, 1897; January 8, 1898.

the Abbeville Lyceum Bureau sponsored an appearance of Charles F. Underhill of New York in an impersonation of Rip Van Winkle. The performance was given at the courthouse and, according to the Meridional review of February 5, ". . . a splendid audience of the best people of town and the surrounding country filled the courtroom For nearly two hours he (Underhill) held his audience in wrapt attention as he depicted in easy, but impressive style the tale of Rip and his shrewish wife. . . ."

Professor Pate, the leader of the recently revived music and dramatic activity in Abbeville, turned to puppetry in April, presenting two performances of his Royal Marionettes on the 9th and 10th. In reviewing the program, the local editor wrote of the marionettes on April 16:

. . . We had the pleasure of seeing them and also of appreciating them, for the manager of the little "troupe" took us behind the curtains and we were shown how the whole thing was handled, and we must say that a good deal of credit is due him. To so closely imitate such things as horses, wagons, mules, acrobats, jugglers, ballet dancers, and a good many others, requires an ingenious mind, and we give him credit for it. The two most realistic representations were the ballet dancers and the prize fighters. The ballet girls were called back several times and the prize fighters brought down the house. Another good feature was the Japanese juggler, this little fellow only twelve inches high came on the little stage and commenced throwing up the three balls he held in his hands far over his head and never missed one of them (,) and last but not least was the old kicking mule, the audience yelled when this little animal came very near demolishing the little cart he was hitched to, and nearly paralyzing the little darkey driving him. . . . The affair was not very successful in a financial light, but the manager says he has shown the people what he could do and that the next time they will know what to expect. . . .

The marionettes were next presented in connection with the Abbeville Silver Cornet Band concert on November 21. The program, advertised as the band's "4th annual entertainment," was held at French Hall and included besides the marionettes a special act by Louis Ochs and Clara Fischer, guest performers from New Iberia, and a "grand cotton field scene. . . entitled Dixie Land."¹²⁷ A final amateur production by the Abbeville amateurs during the period was on December 2, 1898. The Deestrick Skule, a rural comedy, was the play, and the Ladies Aid Society sponsored. The usual brief comment describing the entertainment appeared in the December 10 issue of the

Meridional:

. . . The French Hall was comfortably filled with a large and appreciative audience who had assembled to witness the amateur performance entitled The Deestrick Skule given for the benefit of the Ladies Aid Society. The actors had learned their parts well and gave a very creditable presentation of the play. Mrs. J. E. White carried off the prize in the cake making contest and was awarded a handsome piece of silverware. Refreshments were served after the performance and the affair netted the ladies a handsome little sum.

Breaux Bridge and St. Martinville

The two prominent towns in St. Martin Parish, Breaux Bridge and St. Martinville, remained predominantly French to the end of the nineteenth century. Both towns are steeped in the traditions of their Acadian ancestors; community activities were conducted in French; both

¹²⁷ Ibid., November 12, 26, 1898

villages maintained lively non-professional theater organizations during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Breaux Bridge, the smaller of the towns, is situated on Bayou Teche fifteen miles north of St. Martinville. There, in 1886, Henry Vander Cruysen, a journalist and amateur artist, organized the Breaux Bridge Dramatic Club. The existing record of the activities is found in announcements and occasional reviews published in the St. Martinville Messenger during the period. During the first year the club gave seven performances, the programs usually consisting of one or two short French plays. On October 2 Catherine Howard, a serious play, proved very successful and was given two other performances during the month. In April, 1887, the Dramatic Club reorganized as the Breaux Bridge Literary and Gymnastic Association. Dr. F. R. Martin served as president of the association, and Henry Vander Cruysen continued as dramatic director. Twelve performances were given during 1887. In April, 1888, the association completed its new theater. A grand banquet, served ". . . to about three hundred guests. . . ." on April 21, was the Literary and Gymnastic Association's method of celebrating ". . . the completion of that magnificent building which is now receiving the finishing touches of the painter, Mr. H. Vander Cruysen, the artist of the Association. . . ." ¹²⁸

By June 23 and 24 finishing work on the theater had been completed and the club formally opened it with a program of three French plays:

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St. Martinville Messenger, April 28, 1888.

On ne Passe Pas! ou Le Poste D'Honneur, Le Manteau de Joseph,
and Cerisette en Prison. For Breau Bridge the event was momentous,
and the Messenger editor shared the enthusiasm.

LITERARY AND GYMNASTIC CLUB

On Saturday and Sunday last, the above named Society, which has contributed so much towards maintaining and refining the elegant society of our sister town of Breau Bridge, gave on the occasion of opening their new and magnificent Hall, an entertainment which in brilliancy and splendor, surpassed anything of that kind ever given in that town.

The Hall is beautifully painted and artistically decorated. The stage is a little beauty. the dress circle gives to the spectators all the comfort that may be expected in a place of amusement, in a country town.

The Hall and stage were brilliantly sic illuminated. The whole was very attractive.

The orchestra of the Association, under the leadership of Prof. Florent Sontag, furnished the music for the occasion. . . .129

In addition to maintaining their regular community program of amusements, the Literary and Gymnastic Association gave a number of performances in surrounding French communities. On October 17, 1886, the group gave Catherine Howard at St. Pierre; on April 30, 1887, a production was taken to Faulk's Hall in Lafayette; on the following November 27, the company performed at Duchamp's Hall in St. Martinville. The Dramatic Club and its Brass Band played at Grand Coteau on October 21, 1888; in St. Martinville on May 25, 1889, and January 29, 1893; and in Lafayette again on May 27 of the same year.

129 Ibid., June 30, 1888.

Only twenty-three people were named in the casts of plays presented by the club during the period. Included among these were Dr. F. R. Martin, the Association president; Henry Vander Cruyssen, actor, scenic artist, and director; Paul N. Abadie, secretary of the organization. Others who frequently worked in the productions included Luc Thibodeaux, Jean Durand, Constance and Baptistine Broussard, Ida Thibodeaux, Oscalie Champagne, Octave Guilbeau, Remi Angel, Marcel Patin, Alphonse Geoffroy, Paul Castille, and Florence Sontag. The great amount of work by these actors in the frequent association productions doubtless contributed to a gradually improved efficiency. Frequently, moreover, the brief reviews in the St. Martinville weekly made specific comments of the excellence of the scenery and costumes of individual productions. Of the comedietta given on July 31, 1886, the reviewer observed: ". . . The scene was on ship-board--the scenery, the costumes in fact all the appointments were carefully and with fine judgement splendidly studied. . . ." Of the production of Catherine Howard, possibly an English play since Sidonie Wiltz, Arthur Guilbeau, and Armand Martin, the featured players of the production did not appear in the casts of later French plays, the Messenger reporter commented: ". . . The scenery was appropriate, and seldom, especially in amateur representations, have we seen as much care bestowed upon what is so frequently neglected--the scenic effects. . . ."130

In the early morning of February 5, 1893, fire destroyed the Breaux Bridge theater and the residence of the director, Henry Vander Cruysen. With the home went the equipment of the Breaux Bridge Union, and the office of the Teche and Vermilion telephone line, both of which were housed in the building.¹³¹ During the following months few notices of activity by the Literary and Gymnastic Association of Breaux Bridge appeared in the St. Martinville weekly, the last being a report of a concert by the string band on April 16, 1893.

In St. Martinville, the seat of government of St. Martin parish, non-professional theater had as its leader Judge Felix Voorhies. During the decades of the 1880's and 1890's Judge Voorhies not only directed many of the productions of the Dramatic Association of St. Martinville but wrote many of the plays, dramatic readings, and comic songs which made up the programs.¹³² A number of Judge Voorhies' plays were written during the period of Reconstruction, and were probably produced by amateur groups in St. Martinville during that period. The Gaiety Theatrical Club, under the direction of Mr. J. Oger, produced its first program in St. Martinville April 28, 1874.¹³³ Sometime before 1886 the

¹³¹ Ibid., February 11, 1893; Abbeville Meridional, February 11, 1893.

¹³² Ibid., April 28, May 12, 1888. For a detailed account of Judge Voorhies' plays and his activity in the St. Martinville non-professional theater, see Marcelle Frances Schertz, The Plays of Judge Felix Voorhies, Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1940.

¹³³ New Iberia Sugar-Bowl, May 4, 1874.

Mikado Social Club was organized, and during 1886 and 1887 sponsored public entertainments, including a dramatic program on January 19, 1887, in which the group was assisted by the Ladies Aid Society of St. Martinville.¹³⁴ Also in 1886 The Home Boys, a Negro social organization was active; ". . . a fancy dress ball," by the club was announced for March 8.¹³⁵

After its organization in April, 1888, the St. Martinville Dramatic Association proved to be a community theater. By 1894 the names of more than fifty people had appeared in the casts of its productions. In July, 1888, the club advertised for sealed theater concession bids: for "the privileges for 1st. keeping the bar, 2nd, selling gumbo, 3rd, cream and cakes. . . ."¹³⁶ The organization thus provided for its own financial needs and added to its efficiency in providing for charities and civic organizations which it chose to benefit.

Prominent among the active members of the dramatic club were the Moutons, the Voorhies, the Bienvenus, the Hitters, Dumas Hebert, George Sillan, the Gardemals, the Delahoussayes, George Eastin, the Flemings, the Gerinieres, Theriots and Fournets. Biographical sketches of many of these amateur actors and a great deal of information concerning Duchamp's Hall, the St. Martinville Theater, are included in the early sections of the study of Judge Voorhies' plays by Marcelle Schertz.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ St. Martinville Messenger, January 22, 1887.

¹³⁵ Ibid., February 27, 1886.

¹³⁶ Ibid., June 30, 1888.

¹³⁷ Op. Cit., pp. 1-15.

New Iberia

Present information indicates that the commercial theater in New Iberia relegated community theater to a secondary position shortly after 1880. The New Iberia Opera House was opened no later than 1884.¹³⁸ The theater manager, employed by the Board of Directors who were selected by the stockholders of the New Iberia Opera House Association, arranged an annual theater season which opened in September and continued to March.

During the summer of 1880 the New Iberia Music and Dramatic Club with the town's volunteer fire department planned a train excursion to Thibodaux. The Thibodaux Sentinel announced the excursion plans in its issue of June 19, stating that the train from New Iberia was scheduled to arrive on July 11 ". . . about ten o'clock under the direction of the Musical Club Dramatic Club and the Fire Department of that thriving town. . . ." Nothing more is known of the 1880 amateur theater organization. The second mention of non-professional activity in New Iberia during the decade was the production of Damon and Pythias by the Iberia Lodge of the Knights of Pythias. The first performance of the play was given on April 23, 1885, and on the following evening the amateurs gave an "Ethiopian Burlesque" on Damon and Pythias. The Knights of Pythias sponsored the programs for funds to provide entertainment for the Grand

¹³⁸Issues of Volumes VII and IX of The Stage, official publication of the New Iberia Opera House, contain theater programs for the 1890-1891 and 1892-1893 seasons respectively. If the volumes of the publication were numbered for consecutive theatrical seasons, which fact seems evident, The Stage began publication during the 1884-1885 season. Twenty-seven of the first thirty issues of Volume VII (September 7, 1890-March 1, 1891) and fifteen of the first seventeen issues of Volume IX (September 11, 1892-January 19, 1893) are preserved in the office of the New Iberia Daily Iberian, New Iberia, Louisiana.

Lodge of the State which met in its annual session in New Iberia during the first week in May. On May 7 the amateurs repeated Damon and Pythias for their guests. George H. Ring and Julia Walker, active amateur actors from Jeanerette, appeared in the production. New Iberians who worked with them included John S. Sarrett, L. O. and C. P. Hacker, Dr. A. C. Gayle, Alex Devalcourt, J. G. and S. J. Heard, H. P. Gates, H. Shadall, F. W. Amman, Robert Brown, M. V. Hobert, W. Genereaux, and Mollie and Lissie Childs.¹³⁹

More is known of theatrical activities in New Iberia during the closing decade of the century. The Opera House was used more frequently for amateur productions. In 1894 a group of citizens formed the New Iberia Dramatic Club. During the following year the Area Literary club was organized under the leadership of C. C. Kramer, a local minister.

In September 1889 when a train of excursionists from Thibodaux were guests at a performance in the New Iberia Opera House, they were impressed by the elaborate theater of the Bayou Teche town. Back in Thibodaux the following week the editor of the Thibodaux Comet wrote:

. . . The Opera House of New Iberia is undoubtedly an adjunct of which the people can feel proud. When you enter and behold the lower circle, and then gaze above at the second class seats and then throw your eyes upon the picturesque stage scenery you almost imagine yourself in the Crescent City. One half of the upper portion is utilized as a ball room. . . .¹⁴⁰

At that time Max Mattes was manager of the Opera House and E. F. Millard handled the sale of tickets and edited the official opera house programme. On October 30, 1890, Marie Nesmith, a visiting singer, gave a benefit

¹³⁹New Iberia Enterprise, April 1, 22, May 6, 1885.

¹⁴⁰Thibodaux Comet, September 12, 1889.

performance for the New Iberia Methodist Church. A group of local musicians assisted with the program. A Christmas pageant entitled the Court of King Christmas, a farce entitled Using the Weed, and a variety of recitations and songs by the children of the community made up the Christmas program at the opera house on December 23.¹⁴¹ And on February 26, 1892, a young women's organization listed as "The Y's" gave the play entitled Columbia Enslaved. These rather isolated programs with the closing exercises of St. Peter's Academy, in which the pupils presented Ham, a three act drama, at the Opera House, indicate community theater during these years was of little interest to the citizens.

On July 8, 1892, a literary club, composed of the young men who had earlier used a debate club as an outlet for self-expression during the summer months, held its organizational meeting at the offices of Weeks and Weeks. In a single paragraph in the Democrat issue of July 16 a New Iberia editor referred to the "new life" being instilled into the once lively ". . . but here lately, dormant club." Two years later, the Ladies Aid Society of New Iberia sponsored boat excursions on Bayou Teche as a means of providing funds for the organization. Announcements of the boat trips gave no indication of the types or quantity of entertainment provided the guests; however, those who participated in the first excursion ". . . knew how delightful the ladies can make these excursions. . . ." the Weekly Iberian commented preceding the trip of July 18, 1894.

An attempt was made during the fall of 1894 to establish the New Iberia Dramatic Club. A production of The Western Heiress had not proved successful, and the group planned a second performance on December

¹⁴¹The Stage, VII, No. 16, December 23, 1890.

27. Their announcement on December 22 assured their patrons that ". . . The play has been recast and greatly strengthened, actors more suitable to the parts having been selected. Many new specialties have been added, among the number many bright new songs. . . ." The day of December 27 "was so bitter cold that but few ventured out. . . ." ¹⁴² Nor did the New Iberia Dramatic Club venture further.

A few days later, however, on January 8, 1895, another group of New Iberians met at the home of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Kramer to form the Arena Club, a social and literary club, whose objective was stated to be ". . . the consideration and discussion of current events; for social purposes; for mutual benefit and for practical progress. . . ." At a second meeting of the group at the Kramer residence on Jefferson Street on January 17 the club elected officers and chose a governing and planning committee. Kramer, Andrew Thorpe, E. L. Hyams, and R. S. McMahon were the first club officers; and these with E. T. Weeks, Lelia Perry and Miss Fasnacht made up the governing and planning committee. Members of the Arena Club included a number of leading citizens of New Iberia: Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Cage, Dr. Pierson, Prof. Harris, Col. Fameroy, John and Mary Weeks, Dr. Wall, Prof. Gordon, Mr. Marray, Mary Fitzhugh, Edith Cage, Lissie Devalcourt, and Mary Pallerin. Others had joined the group by the time of the first program, arranged for the home of R. H. Cage on January 31. The Arena Club probably included dramatic performances at the Opera House in its program of activities during the spring of 1895. In explaining the small audience of about three hundred in attendance

¹⁴² Weekly Iberian, December 22, 29, 1894.

at a June 22 production of the operetta Princess Bonnia by the Opelousas Joe Jefferson Dramatic Club, the Weekly Iberian editor observed:

. . . The small attendance is due to several reasons. First, there have been several local amateur performances lately, all of which charged admission fees. Besides these there has been a tournament, shortly we will have another, and so on, hence New Iberia is continually putting her hands in her pockets. . . .¹⁴³

On February 18, 1896, New Iberia produced a grand carnival which provided entertainment for thousands of guests who came from neighboring towns in the Bayou Country. Details of the program have not been recorded; however, the Abbeville editor, in reporting of the special train from that village to the carnival, wrote:

THE NEW IBERIA CARNIVAL

For a first attempt the people of New Iberia have certainly done themselves proud in the grand carnival display they made last Tuesday. Over ten thousand people from the neighboring towns were in attendance and all unite in pronouncing the carnival a grand success. The Southern Pacific ran a special train from Abbeville leaving here at 5:30 p.m. and returning at midnight. Over 200 persons went from here and the coaches were crowded to their utmost capacity. May the New Iberia carnival become a permanent institution.¹⁴⁴

The carnival type of entertainment was common among the south Louisiana communities, and as a rule the programs included theatrical performances. The scale of the carnival project in New Iberia made it unusual. In April, 1897, the organization was incorporated as the Iberia Carnival Association, Limited, its charter stating broad objectives:

. . . The purpose of the Association are to give public entertainments, carnivals and other exhibitions, concerts etc., and to furnish other forms of legitimate entertain-

¹⁴³ Ibid., June 29. (Also see Opelousas St. Landry Clarion, June 29, 1895.)

¹⁴⁴ Abbeville Meridional, February 22, 1896.

ments to the public, and to engage in such business enterprises as will be of utility, to establish such reading rooms, libraries, to the purposes set forth above. . . .¹⁴⁵

The names of twenty prominent citizens of New Iberia appeared as charter members of the organization. The initial Board of Directors was composed of J. B. Lawton, Pierre Jubin, W. J. Burke, M. F. Millard, C. P. Moss, A. Daigre, J. P. Superbielle, J. W. Compton, Robert A. Martin, A. J. Naumus, A. C. Pickett, and Frank Patin.

Two amateur performances were reported at the opera house during 1896-1897, and neither of the programs was well attended. The first, Indiana on October 26, 1896, was well played, according to the brief review, J. H. Curtis, Willie Davis, William Delahoussaye, Fred Grube, John French, Jack Lamperez, and Gertrude V. Curtis appeared in the cast. Hardly "a hundred persons" attended the program.¹⁴⁶ The second, on April 19, 1897, was the operetta Cinderella in Flowerland with a cast of fifty children. The program was directed by Mrs. M. Farley, a local teacher. Olive Slutz and Grace Morse, dramatic readers, and a vocal quartet composed of Mrs. J. C. M. Robertson, Miss Hodge, Jeff Armandez, and Jules Dupuy, provided special features of the program. The operetta entertainment was given to benefit the New Iberia Presbyterian Church. The opera house was "not crowded but there was a fairly good audience. . . ."¹⁴⁷

On April 1, 1898, the New Iberia Opera House was destroyed by fire. The building, which originally cost \$27,000, was not insured at the time, the insurance having been discontinued a short time before be-

¹⁴⁵Weekly Iberian, April 24, 1897.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., October 31, 1896.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., April 24, 1897.

cause of an increased rate. Also housed in the building were the New Iberia postoffice and the printing plant of the Iberia Interprise. Not until June, 1899, was there a stir among the amateur actors again. During the year there was a hope among the people of New Iberia that their town would possibly be chosen as the site for Southwestern Louisiana Institute, at that time referred to in the weekly newspapers as the Industrial School. The Weekly Iberian, in the issue of June 3, reported that "Rumors" were current of the re-organization of the Mystic Star Minstrels for the purpose of giving "an exhibition or two for the Industrial school." Several weeks later, on July 22 the paper wrote further that "New Iberia's chances for capturing the Industrial School are growing brighter with each succeeding day. The entertainments which were given of late have been swelling up the fund for the School a great deal. . . ."

Whether the programs referred to included performances by the minstrel troupe was not made clear. Indeed, the earlier activity of the Mystic Star Minstrels, implied in the fact that this was a "re-organization," was not recorded in the available files of the weekly newspapers during the period.

In July F. F. Veasey, a New Iberia business man, announced the intentions of the Veasey Brothers firm to convert the upper story of their building into "an opera house seating five hundred. . . ." Work was to be completed by September 1, and on August 12 the brothers announced a schedule of theatrical companies under contract to perform in the new theater during the season which was to begin with Eugenie Blair in The Lady of Quality on October 1.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸Ibid., July 22, August 12, 1899.

Professional theater, therefore, was a paying business in New Iberia. The survey indicates, fragmentary though it is, that amateur theater was not consistently patronized by the community during the period between 1880 and 1900. Thus, citizens who participated in public social activities were more successful in debate and literary clubs and, finally, in the New Iberia Carnival Association which was chartered in 1897.

Opelousas

The people of Opelousas maintained a consistently energetic non-professional theater activity throughout the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Their theater organizations usually included among their membership individuals experienced in management and directing, and a bountiful corps of experienced and new performers. Only between June, 1882, and February, 1883, was the town without an adequate theater. Opelousas patronized the theater enthusiastically, and seldom did a period of more than a few months pass without performances by an organized group of amateur actors. During the twenty year period there were ten well formed clubs, three of which were able to maintain their activity for extended periods.

Chief among these theater groups were the Opelousas Philharmonic Association, the Opelousas Social Circle Dramatic Club, and the Joe Jefferson Dramatic Club. The Philharmonic Association was organized under the leadership of Rudolph Mayer, a local music teacher, in April, 1879, and continued to January, 1882. Mayer reorganized the group as the Opelousas Philharmonic, Literary, and Dramatic Association in May, 1888, and its public performances continued until October, 1895. Paralleling

the music organization in time was the Opelousas Social Circle which was organized in July, 1879, by the veteran amateur director, Simon Richard, then in his sixty-third year. The club became inactive after September, 1880, but was reorganized as the Opelousas Social Club in February, 1885, and maintained an active program until May, 1894. The Joe Jefferson Dramatic Club followed the Philharmonic and Social Club groups, being activated under the leadership of Charles Grant Shaffer, the public school principal, in December, 1894, and continuing until February, 1897. The minor dramatic clubs, composed chiefly of individuals from the major clubs, provided theatrical entertainment during the intervals when the Philharmonic and Social Clubs were inactive.

Professional theater in Opelousas gradually increased in importance after 1883, after Perredin's Hall replaced the old Varieties and provided a more adequate theater. During much of the time until 1895, the local amateur groups controlled the management of the theater by lease, and non-professional activity was not restricted for want of a theater.

During 1880 Opelousas amateurs gave twelve performances. Activities began on February 2 with the Social Circle production of Revenge, a three-act "sensational drama" written by a member of the club. Two evenings later The Philharmonic Association presented the comic operetta The Last Will and Testament, and The Dead Shot. Experienced actors of the late years of the Reconstruction period appeared in the casts of these club productions. C. B. Anderson, F. F. Perredin, A. J. Perrault, Thomas P. Bowden, Gilbert L. Dupre, W. G. Hogan, Mary Deitlein, a Miss Vatter, and one of the Hebrard actresses, either Corien or Nina both of whom were prominent in non-professional theater, made up the cast of the premiere performance of Social Circle play. Bowden, probably the town's most accom-

plished comedian, W. G. Regan, and Gilbert L. Dupre also appeared in the cast of the Philharmonic Association farce The Dead Shot. S. Bloch, Helen Perkins, Effie Haler, and Mr. Mandell completed the play cast, and four young women--Helen Perkins, Lissie Parrett, Effie Haler, and L. Gibbs--performed in the operetta. Among these names only Mary Deitlein, Effie Haler, Dupre, Regan, Bloch, and Mandell had not worked in earlier plays.

On March 30 and 31 the two associations joined forces in presenting programs for the benefit of the Opelousas Episcopal Church. Hans, a three-act comedy, and Trotti's Troubles were given the first evening; Lean Year Privileges and an unnamed farce closed the benefit. Audiences were described as "pretty good" at the plays. Admission was fifty cents, the prevailing price set for regular performances of the two dramatic associations.

Simon Richard died of a sudden illness on April 28, 1880.

Opelousas paid final tribute to one of its most versatile citizens. The District Court in session suspended its proceedings; the Social Circle met and drafted a tribute of respect to its founder and leader. The May 1 issue of the Courier related in resume the accomplishments of the town's beloved and respected Simon Richard:

. . . He was a man of most extraordinary and versatile genius. His inventive powers were never exhausted; and he had only to conceive an idea, when it was given tangible shape, by finished symmetry in skilled workmanship. His mechanical genius was a marvel to every one; and it was a common saying that "whatever Prof. Richard undertakes he always does well." The puppets he manufactured some years ago, and the wonderful feats and evolutions he made them perform, were almost miracles in invention. His exhibitions of multiform fireworks of his own manufacture were always interesting, novel and instructive. During the war he manufactured gunpowder, percussion caps, matches and castor oil. He could execute a splendid wood-cut of almost any design. He was a man of excellent histrionic talents, and would have made a successful stage manager. He was a man

of decided artistic genius, and would have made (a) reputation as a landscape painter, with the cultivation necessary to have developed his great natural gifts. He was an experienced and skillful engineer, and it is in this capacity particularly that he will be missed. . . .

In announcing organization officers following Richard's death, the Social Circle did not include the name of the new director. F. F. Perredin, a young Opelousas attorney, continued to serve as president, having been elected to that office since the beginning. Thomas Bowden, Ella Bloomfield, H. P. Veasie, L. A. Cooke, and Sidney J. Hebrard were chosen to the other positions. Bowden, C. B. Anderson, or Perredin were experienced and may have alternated in directing the plays. On May 18 the club presented at Varieties Hall The Marble Heart, or the Sculptor's Dream with C. B. Anderson, F. F. Perredin, Thomas Bowden, Ella Bloomfield, Corien Hebrand, Mary Deitlein, and Justine Christman in the cast. In reviewing the production the Courier editor confessed his earlier doubts that the local amateurs should undertake a play so difficult, but the Social Circle's "ambition resulted in a pronounced success." Anderson and Perredin were commended for their excellent work in the difficult play, the former having particularly impressed the writer:

. . . The acting of Mr. C. B. Anderson cannot be too highly commended. He played with great feeling and discrimination, which entitles him to much praise. His voice is of good compass, and he is altogether, as an amateur, a skilled actor and a most capable artist.

Mr. F. F. Perredin sustained his part also in a manner particularly worthy of mention, and kept the audience in continual laughter. Mr. T. P. Bowden was "awfully clever," and took off his role in his usual "phunny" style

. . . .¹⁴⁹

Opelousas patrons filled Varieties Hall "to overflowing" and the play was

¹⁴⁹Opelousas Courier, May 22, 1880.

repeated on May 27, at which time the Breamx Bridge String Band provided music.

During May a group of young men announced the organization of the Opelousas Dramatic Association. E. Sumter Taylor and Thomas P. Bowden headed the organization as president and stage manager, respectively. Other members of the new group, George A. Freret, Sol. Bloch, Fred J. Mayer, Charles F. Garland, and Gilbert L. Dupre, included names familiar from previous Philharmonic and Social Circle Association productions. The group put into rehearsal Catherina Howard, which was planned for production "in a very short time." No record of the performance has been discovered; moreover, the new dramatic association was not mentioned in later issues of the Opelousas weeklies.

The Philharmonic Association conducted its semi-annual election in May. Helen Perkins became the new president, and Rudolph Mayer continued as musical director. Fred J. Mayer, Gilbert L. Dupre, Sol. Bloch, Mrs. M. Parrott, and Effie Ealer were elected to the staff of the organization. On June 22 The Philharmonic Association gave the first of two performances of Ben Bolli, a nautical operetta in two acts and five scenes. Director Rudolph Mayer adapted the orchestrations for the association orchestra, painted new scenery for the five scenes, and directed the production. With Helen Perkins, Thomas P. Bowden, and Lizzie Parrott, experienced performers in previous musical productions, Mayer introduced a number of new singers in his cast: Fred Mayer, Sumpter Taylor, James and Ben Maginley, Gus Munzenheimer, and George Liberman. The operetta was repeated on July 13.

The Social Circle's presentation of Fruits of the Wine Cup on

July 8 fell below the standard established by the group in earlier programs. The plays was poor, according to the Courier report, and the company lacked sufficient rehearsal time. Goat as a Cucumber was the farce, and the Breaux Bridge String Band provided music. These supplied redeeming elements on the program which was attended by a "very large audience" including the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and prominent attorneys from other parishes who were in Opelousas for the current court session.¹⁵⁰

The Social Circle elected new members to its staff of officers in July. T. M. Anderson became the new director, A. J. Bercier, H. J. Chachere, Nina Hebrard, Mary Deitlein, and C. B. Anderson joined F. F. Perrodin, the president, in directing the activities of the group. On July 27 the club celebrated its anniversary with a supper and grand ball at the Varieties Theater. Soon thereafter the club put in rehearsal The Husband of an Hour, scheduled for production in September. The performance was not reported in the local weeklies. It seems likely that the preparation was interrupted by a two-evening entertainment projected by the Episcopal Church for its benefit. The church plays were given on October 5 and 6 at the Varieties, and the Courier reported that "some of the best amateur talents in our two associations took part in these dramas. . . ." Our Wife, or the Rose of Arlene was the feature play on October 5. The Opelousas Minstrals, "a new feature on our boards," served for the afterpiece on the program. The following evening In the Wrong House, or No. 6 Duke Street, and A Kiss in the Dark made up the program, the final amateur production recorded during 1880.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., July 17, 1880.

In mid-December the two amateur clubs announced plans for re-organizing for the coming year. It is evident, however, that they had merged into the Philharmonic Association by January when the Courier reported that the association had leased the Varieties Theater for the year and was ready to begin the new season.

We understand that our popular Philharmonic Association is concentrating its operatic and dramatic forces so as to achieve new honors, and add still greater triumphs in its amateur performances during the year 1881. The Varieties Hall has been leased by the Association, and is being rehabilitated, so as not only to promote its comfort, but materially improve the scenic effects of the stage, and the acoustics of the hall. Within a couple of weeks, the thrilling comedy--Handy Andy--will be produced, with Mr. Tom Bowden in the title role, and supported by a cast of some of the best talents in the Association.¹⁵¹

Joseph Bloch was elected president of the association at the semi-annual election on January 7, 1881. Thomas P. Bowden and A. J. Bercier, earlier officers in the Social Circle; Effie Ealer and Rudolph Mayer, established figures in the Philharmonic Association during 1880; and Edmund C. Quirk and Nathaniel J. Kaufman, new members, made up the new staff of the association. Possibly renovating activities at the theater prevented the Handy Andy performance. None was reported during January.

By the first week in February the association had "in studious preparation" Richard, or Home-Treck, described as ". . . a play suggested by Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden' and adapted as an Operetta, by Prof. Mayer, musical director of the Philharmonic Association. . . ." ¹⁵² At that time

¹⁵¹ Ibid., January 1, 1881.

¹⁵² Ibid., February 5, 1881. Possibly the Opelousas musician made his adaptation from the three-act musical drama based on the Enoch Arden story under the same title by Stirling and Dennis Coyne.

the Courier reported that ". . . the Varieties Hall has been thoroughly renovated from base to attic, the stage enlarged in all its dimensions, and highly illustrative scenery painted--by Prof. Mayer--expressly for this operetta. . . ." Much work went toward the preparation of Richard. Advanced notices in the weekly emphasized the technical aspects of the production. There were seven scenes for each of which the director painted special scenery. A new drop curtain was added to the stage. And in the closing scene,

. . . representing the storm and shipwreck on the Cornish Coast, the rolling sea will appear like nature itself. The billows, where Richard plunges in to save Walter Ellington, will appear like actual, turbulent waves going off for miles in the gradual blending perspective, forcibly illustrating the fury and majesty of a storm at sea. The scenic effects will far surpass anything yet presented on the boards of the Varieties Hall. . . .¹⁵³

Despite the long period of rehearsal and technical preparations, the play was not polished when it was presented before a crowded Varieties Theater audience on February 22. Individual performers among the rather large cast of fifteen principals gained commendation in the review for their work. C. B. Anderson, Fred J. Mayer, Lissie Parrott, Thomas P. Bowden, E. Sumter Taylor, Henry Larcade, George Pulford, A. J. Berrier, Justine Christman, and R. C. Mayer were among the experienced actors. The association deserved great credit for this production and should be encouraged to "go on cultivating the splendid amateur talents, which are so conspicuous in their extensive membership," the Courier editor wrote. In evaluating the production as a whole, however, he observed:

¹⁵³Ibid., February 19, 1881

. . . notwithstanding the performance was a very good one, it is to be regretted that the play was not kept in preparation, at least, one week longer. The public being now familiar with the plot and incidents of the piece, can readily perceive that it demanded close and studious rehearsal, not only for a thrilling interpretation of the dramatic events clustering around the central figures, but also to forcibly bring out that unity of action and striking illustration which rested in the satellites, or support of the theme. . . . A week or two more of preparation would have improved the ~~four-ensemble~~ of the piece
¹⁵⁴

On April 20, the date of its second anniversary, the Opelousas Philharmonic Association conducted an informal program of vocal and instrumental music and a ball at Varieties Hall. Members of the club selected from their individual repertoires favored selections for the music program, and the audience was restricted to holders of tickets of invitation distributed by active members of the club. Their summer production followed at the opera house on July 13. Preciosa, or the Tynd Sisters, a three-act operetta of simple plot and music. Lizzie Parrott, Helen Perkins, Effie Kaler, Justine Christman, and Edith Mayer took the principal roles in the story of the unhappy May Queen. Opelousas school-age youngsters made up the School Girl Chorus in the opening and closing acts; experienced members of the association led by Thomas Bowden, N. J. Kaufman, and Henry Larcade worked in the gypsy camp scenes. W. O. Posey, C. L. Benjamin, Eugene and Julie Bloch, Pauline Isaac, Fannie Mayer, and the association director composed the orchestra for the production, which the Courier designated as "another triumph."¹⁵⁵

Another Opelousas music teacher, Professor Eckart, initiated a move to organize a brass band. On August 13 the band completed its

¹⁵⁴Ibid., February 26, 1881.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., July 16, 1881.

organisation and became known as the Wm. A. Robertson Brass Band.¹⁵⁶ The group organized a minstrel troupe to raise funds with which to buy instruments and supplies. Led by George Fulford, Thayer, Williams, Bob Littell, and Bokart, the minstrel company gave their first entertainment at the Varieties on September 14. The audience was small because of inclement weather, and the program was repeated on September 22, at which time The Geopara was an added feature. The performance was much superior to the earlier attempt, and the attendance was good. Another organization of amateurs in Opelousas was under way, and added to its forces during the following months when the Philharmonic Association became inactive.

On October 12 the Philharmonic Association returned to the Varieties stage. Two comedies, Parfession and His Last Legs, made up the program. Rudolph Mayer, the musical director who usually managed the productions, provided interlude music with assistance from Pauline Isaac. This program was the first by the association when music was not a prominent element of the entertainment. The plays were not of the usual quality which characterized previous productions. Nevertheless, the Courier review was complimentary.

. . . This programme was a departure from the legitimate repertoire of the Association, which heretofore have included operettas and heavier dramas only, but we must say, that in doing so, they made a decided hit, and achieved one of the most complete triumphs recorded for their many performances. The cast of characters was admirably selected, including the leading dramatic talents of the Association, and each and

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., August 13, September 10, 1881. The band was named for William A. Robertson, prominent St. Landry parish physician, attorney, and State Senator during the late years of the Reconstruction period and the early 1880's. Robertson came to Louisiana in 1852 from Connecticut. Following the Civil War his family settled near Washington in St. Landry Parish where he died on October 26, 1889. (St. Landry Democrat, November 2, 1889.)

every one of them, gave an excellent and telling interpretation of the role assigned them. . . . Our people are particularly indebted to the Philharmonic Association for this new feature in their efforts to cater to popular amusement. If we have all operettas and strong dramas, a surfeit of sentiment and aesthetics is almost sure to supervene; but if we are made to laugh heartily by the occasional presentation of good comedies and farces, it keeps up a healthy reaction and prevents the danger of satiety. . . .¹⁵⁷

The July production of the association, reported as being a very light musical play with a cast made up predominantly of the young ladies of the organization, to be followed by a program of light farces strongly suggests a lessening of interest or possibly a preoccupation of the leading members of the Philharmonic Association. The reviews of both programs, particularly the one quoted here, lacked the detailed reporting which had been the earlier practice. The commendations were general, even conciliatory.

In November the Courier announced that the association was "about disbanding." The final dissolution came on January 31, 1882, with the sale of the association's property. In summary the Courier presented the picture of the Club's activities:

. . . When the Association was first organized, the charter members numbered only a few, and did not own a piece of property. The only stock it then had was the musical and dramatic talents of its amateur membership; but it required a very short time for them to make a reputation by their interesting entertainments in lyrical and dramatic art, and to increase their roster to an immense and attractive body. Their performances were so many triumphs to themselves, and sources of much pleasure and interest to their appreciative audiences. The first year of its existence was one of progress and prosperity; the musical talents of the membership were materially cultivated; and the various performances brought money into the treasury. A new and fine piano was bought and paid

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., October 15, 1881.

for; the stage of the old Varieties Hall was enlarged and new scenery added, and the house furnished with comfortable chairs to seat the largest audiences. All of these things were paid for and belonged to the Association. But gradually-- for lack of interest-- the members resigned until comparatively few remained. These few became discouraged, and determined to dissolve the organization. The grand finale of the matter concludes next Tuesday by a sale of the piano, furniture, &c. . . .¹⁵⁸

In the meantime the W. A. Robertson Brass Band assumed leadership in amateur dramatic activities in Opelousas. Their minstrel troupe scheduled its second program of fresh routines and a farce The Egyptian Mummy for Varieties Hall on December 21, 1881. Negro citizens of the town organized a brass band during November, probably under the instruction of Prof. Eckart, and were included in the editorial comments of the St. Landry Democrat on December 3: ". . . Not long since there was no brass band at Opelousas; now there is [^{sig}] two, one colored and one white, both of which perform well for the short time they have been instructed."

Three dramatic programs in May, 1882, concluded the stage performances for one of the leanest years for the amateurs in Opelousas. On May 10 the Episcopal Church sponsored a program at Varieties Hall for its benefit. A comedy, a farce, and music by the W. A. R. Band comprised the program. On May 19 Helen Donato, teacher in the Negro school, directed a dramatic benefit program for the school. The entertainment was held at the Donato home. Admission was twenty-five cents, and refreshments were served following the performance to add to the financial success of the project.¹⁵⁹ Out in the Streets, produced by the W. A. R. Band with some of the experienced amateurs of Opelousas,

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., January 28, 1882

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., May 13, 1882.

was the last play of the year; in fact, it was the final amateur production at old Varieties Hall which soon reverted to the more practical use of a commercial firm in Opelousas.¹⁶⁰

F. F. Perrodin, then district attorney, played the leading role in this final amateur production at the old Varieties. A. J. Perrault, Frank Pulford, Henry D. Larcade, a popular local tinner, and Anthony Deitlein, a general merchant, appeared in the other male roles in the play. The veteran feminine amateurs included Justine Christman, Mary Deitlein, Nina Hebrard, and a newcomer named only as Miss A. Reynolds. The performance was pronounced a "success in every particular," by the St. Landry Democrat, and the Courier editor predicted for the W. A. R. Band a growing organization which would prove a capable successor to the Philharmonic Association. By October, however, the band had lost its director, and the group became inactive.

A Debate Club, organized among the young men, provided a diversion during the summer months. J. M. Taylor, W. S. Frazee, Joseph Gibbs, R. Mornhinveg were the officers of the club. The debates were held at weekly meetings on Saturday evenings; subjects were light and conducive to pleasure: "In which is there most pleasure, pursuit or possession"; and "which affords the greatest field for argument, the pulpit or the bar?"¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ The Varieties Theater on Main Street in Opelousas opened under the management of James S. Charles in October, 1856. In July, 1869, L. Vatter, a local furniture manufacturer and dealer, leased the hall as a display room for his furniture. Simon Richard reinaugurated it as the Varieties Theater on July 4, 1874, with a program of shadow pantomime, dissolving views, and a performance by his puppets. What immediate use was made of the hall after May, 1882, is not known; however, in March, 1895, J. Meyers & Company was using the hall as a "carriage repository." (Opelousas Courier, March 9, 1895).

¹⁶¹ St. Landry Democrat, July 1, 1882.

Opelousas citizens called for a theater during the fall months of 1882. The volunteer fire companies formed an association in September and proposed building a structure which would serve to house their equipment and to provide a public hall for the use of the community. New equipment purchased by the firemen required funds which the companies attempted to raise by conducting a series of grand balls, the first being held on October 28. At the time C. Deitlein, an Opelousas business man, had just completed a new storehouse at the corner of Main and St. Landry streets. During November and December the firemen were permitted to stage their fancy dress balls in the new building before its occupancy by the business firm. In the meantime J. and A. Perrodin were constructing a large hall which was to replace the Varieties as the Opelousas theatre. On February 6, 1883, the firemen staged a Grand Calico Ball, the first public entertainment held in Perrodin Hall.¹⁶² Work continued on the hall until May when the Courier announced plans of the Fire Company to organize a dramatic club which would give a series of plays during the summer. In June the group put into rehearsal Single Life, one of a group of plays secured for performance during the series. However, the July 4 program included Our Wife, or The Rose of Amiens and a Molière comedy Le Mariage Forcé. Of the seventeen actors appearing in the two plays only four had been familiar in earlier productions. W. C. Perrault and F. F. Perrodin, attorneys; Henry D. Larcade, the tinner; and Justine Christman were experienced performers. Perrodin was the only one of the four to perform in the French play. J. E. Beaudry, R. Mornhinveg, J. E. and H. E. Estorge, J. P. Robin, Mrs. Generec, and Misses Gibbs and Hardy completed the cast of the Molière piece. New actors in the English play included Robert Price,

¹⁶² Courier, February 5, 10, 17, 1883

William Lightley, C. W. DuRoy, J. P. Robin, and Samuel Price.

The amateurs needed more study and rehearsing, the Courier critic observed, but the crowded house greeted the debut of the new dramatic association with enthusiasm.¹⁶³ The plays were repeated on July 18, at which time the drawing of a \$500 lottery was made. The Fire Company sponsored in connection with the lottery a ticket sales contest. Mrs. Ceneres, by selling 108 tickets, was declared winner of the necklace given as the prize. Financially, the project was rewarding for the firemen. The amateur actors had no motivation other than to prepare a program, and this single program was all they did.

During 1884 and 1885 the non-professional theatrical activity in Opelousas was unimpressive. After a local minstrel performance which was announced for January 6, 1884, with the Breaux Bridge Brass Band providing the music, a year passed without event. In February, 1885, a group of eleven young men formed the Opelousas Social Club, the staff of the organization being composed of Alphonse Levy, C. Deitlein, Samuel Price, J. Frankel, B. F. Meginley, and S. Hebrard. During the first months of the organization's activity, its efforts were put to providing social entertainment probably for its rather select group. In the meantime, on June 8 and 9, the Catholic school of Opelousas sponsored a fair and theatrical entertainment. The advertisement outlined plans for a "magnificent lottery!! 100 winning Lots! . . . Most comical and laughable plays, by a band of amateurs . . ."¹⁶⁴ The entertainment was conducted at

¹⁶³ Ibid., July 7, 1883

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., June 6, 1885

Perrodin's Hall where on October 15 the ladies of the Episcopal Church managed a benefit performance which ". . . was a gratifying success financially as well as in other respects"165

In November the Social Club rented Perrodin's Hall and conducted weekly entertainments which featured dancing and skating. The first Wednesday of each month was the occasion of a grand ball. On December 17 the club presented Kind To A Fault, its first dramatic production. Membership in the organization had increased from the original eleven to twenty-four. Alphonse Levy continued to serve as president and Gus E. Fontenot, Maurice Depres, and J. Frankel completed the staff.

In March, 1886, another group of Opelousas citizens began rehearsals of Ten Nights In A Bar-Room. The group began work with the difficult play as a "self-imposed" task, though the receipts were to benefit the Opelousas Fire Company No. 1. Evidently the undertaking proved too difficult, since a date of performance was not announced. On July 29 the Social Club gave its second play, Naval Engagements. A number of the experienced amateurs of Opelousas appeared in the cast of the amusing farce, and again the audience was large. Pauline Isaac and Joseph L. Cain, Gabrielle Hebrard, Isaac Roos, Robert H. Firmberg, Anthony Deitlein, and Misses M. Jagon and H. Collin participated in the entertainment, the latter young ladies providing music between acts of the play. The review of the play by the Courier was more specific and complimentary than any review of an amateur performance that had been written since the Philharmonic Association was at the height of its popularity in 1881. Along with the commendations handed to the performers, the reviewer returned to the practice of including critical

165 Ibid., October 17, 1885

advice:

. . . The performance of Naval Engagements was a gratifying success in every way; but we would say to our friends of the Club, although they did remarkably (sic) well--there is room for improvement. Study, study is the only Sesame that can give entrance to any art or calling...¹⁶⁶

The Social Club did not return immediately to the stage of Perrodin's Hall. L. E. Littell, Joseph L. Cain, A. J. Bloch, and Isaac Roos were elected to staff offices in August. Alphonse Levy, the initial president of the club, continued to serve in that position. On November 24, the Episcopal Church sponsored a presentation of A Lesson In Love. Individuals were not mentioned in the review, rather the case " . . . gave a most excellent interpretation of the different roles of the piece. They were not only fully up in their parts, but rendered the details with such admirable spirit that the large and appreciative audience were entirely captivated by the delightful rendition of the humorous plot underlying the comedy." ¹⁶⁷

Professional companies playing in Opelousas during the winter of 1886-1887 included the Troné Family Variety Combination of Thibodaux. Scheduled for performance on December 27 and 28, the management contracted to donate one half of the receipts to the local fire company.

Again on April 11, 1887, the Episcopal Church sponsored a theatrical entertainment at Perrodin's Hall for its building fund. Neither the participants nor the plays were given comment in a review. It was about this time that the Social Club leased Perrodin's Hall, equipped it with new stage equipment, and began preparation for another of its plays. The

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., August 14, 1886

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., December 4, 1886

club conducted several departments and activities during 1887. Among these was the Social Club Literary Department, which conducted weekly programs of debate, recitations and music, and informal dancing and skating parties in the club room above M. P. Young's Drug Store. In June members of the organization began a move to establish a library and reading room.

After completing its work of remodeling the theater, the Social Club announced plans to contract with the Texas Circuit for professional company engagements at least once each month. The Celebrated Case, the Social Club's summer production was presented on August 4. The large cast, headed by Joseph L. Cain, Robert H. Firnberg, Pauline Isaac, and Gabrielle Hebrard, included many new actors. There were three members of the Bloch family — A. J., Lucille, and Julie. Aaron Loeb, Alfred Dupre, James B. Meginley, Misses L. and V. Bloomfield, Maurice Depres, Lena Firnberg, and Louis Jagon completed the cast. On August 16 the Literary Department presented at Perrodin's Hall a program of "recitations, readings, songs, solos, and instrumental music," and on the 24 The Celebrated Case was repeated. The Courier allegedly speaking for the community following this production wrote:

. . .The Opelousas Social Club must not rest upon the well earned laurels of its members. They have achieved such signal triumphs in a few weeks past, that an appreciative and critical public call for new proofs of their dramatic talents in the future. Let them arrange their repertoire for the fall and winter season. If they will, we ask for no traveling professionals. We glory in home genius and histrionic talent.¹⁶⁸

Again the winter passed without a major amateur production.

Members of the Literary Branch of the Social Club planned a variety program to be given at Perrodin's Hall on December 20 for the benefit of the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., September 3, 1887

volunteer firemen. For this program the group designated themselves as the Amateur Shakespearian Recitation Club. A few weeks later, on January 13, other members working under the title of Excelsior Dramatic Club gave an entertainment which included a play and music, at M. P. Young's Hall. The admission fee was only twenty-five cents. Attendance was excellent, "over \$50 being taken in." Encouraged by this initial success, the branch dramatic group of the Social Club put into rehearsal again Ten Nights In A Bar Room. And again the undertaking proved more than the club could do, and rehearsals were stopped. It is evident at this point that interests of the various Social Club groups varied so widely that none of their projects had any marked success. The management of the Theater which the club had under lease, the Literary division, and the new Dramatic group undoubtedly prevented the total membership's being able to work under a unified leadership. The club selected new officers on February 2, electing a number of its members who had worked in its theater programs of the preceding months. J. L. Cain became the new president, replacing Alphonse Levy who had headed the group since its organization. O. H. Terwilliger, Jonas Jacobs, Alfred Dupre, Robert Firnberg, and Sydney Hebrard comprised the new staff. Nevertheless, the Social Club did not attempt another public performance until October, 1888.

The inability of the Social Club to function as a community organization during this period was no doubt a contributing factor in motivating Rudolph Mayer to reorganize the Philharmonic Association. On May 15 the new group met, named its club the Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association of Opelousas, and elected its first staff officers. Mayer was the logical choice for president. Two Opelousas matrons, Mrs. V. K. Johnson and Mrs. C. Settoon, were elected first and second vice presidents, respec-

tively. J. J. Thompson, treasurer; Dr. A. J. Bercier, lately graduated from the Baltimore Dental College, recording secretary; E. J. Clements, financial secretary; Mrs. A. J. Bercier, stewardess; and Frank J. Pulford, sergeant-at-arms, were other officers. The club rented a hall on the second floor of the Bailey Drugstore Building, purchased a piano, provided new lighting equipment, and redecorated the hall for weekly programs. Once each month, beginning on June 15, the association gave a public concert at their hall. At the August 31 concert they initiated the practice of charging an admission fee of fifty cents for adults and twenty-five cents for children. At that time the association had grown to seventy-five "paying members" and their concerts gained in popularity.¹⁶⁹

The Social Circle returned to the entertainment competition in Opelousas on October 3, presenting a two-part program at their hall. Vocal and instrumental music and recitations made up the first portion of the program, and The Mouse Trap, a farce with a cast including Joseph L. Cain and six young ladies, closed the entertainment. Admission was only twenty-five cents, and attendance was good. Children of the Episcopal Sunday School presented Cinderella, with tableaux, at Social Club Hall on October 20, and the Philharmonic Association followed with a grand concert and ball at Bailey's Hall on October 31.

During the following months both the Social Club and the Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association continued presenting their concerts and variety entertainments. Of the October 31 Philharmonic program the Democrat editor noted:

¹⁶⁹St. Landry Democrat, September 8, 1888.

. . . Prof. R. Mayer, President and Music Director of this Association, seems to have impressed the members and the public in general that there is more charm in poetry than in prose. His selections are always of the best masters and nothing is produced but what will stand a fair criticism, and the proof of the public's appreciation for his work is sufficiently shown by the quiet attention during the performance of so long a programme. . . .170

Admission prices continued to be twenty-five cents to the Social Club programs at Perrodin's Hall and fifty and twenty-five cents to the Philharmonic programs at Bailey's Hall. On December 3 the Social Club gave a fancy dress ball, with the gentlemen's costumes being ordered through J. Meyers Company. On January 31, 1889, the group returned to the usual variety program, closing with the farce The Boston Drip. After their concert on February 22 at Bailey's Hall, the Philharmonic Association put Ten Nights In A Bar-Room in rehearsal, the third attempt that had been made by an Opelousas club to produce the play. Under the direction of Rudolph Mayer, the performance on May 20 at Perrodin's Hall was effective. Mayer cast the play from a group of actors new on the Opelousas stage. Frank Pulford, Dr. A. J. Bercier, and Carrie Rogers had appeared in previous plays; however, A. J. Guidry, J. M. Morris, J. J. Healey, E. R. White, Lucas Fontenot, Pamela and Emmie Moore, and Olympia Laas were unfamiliar earlier. According to the Courier,

. . . The rendition of this thrilling piece was well sustained to the end, showing careful study and a vivid conception of the parts by each of the performers, and such a realistic development of the stirring and tragic scenes of the plot as to evoke rounds of applause from the large and appreciative audience that filled the hall. . . .171

On June 5 the play was repeated for the benefit of the public school

170 Ibid., November 10, 1888.

171 Courier, May 25, 1889.

building fund. The audience was small.

The program of activities of the two associations continued to be conducted at their respective halls during the remainder of 1889 and through 1890. The plays were not of the usual quality that had marked previous selections, though their programs contained a variety needed to maintain a sustained interest. The Social Club program of June 26, 1889, included A Japanese Wedding in pantomime and tableaux. On October 28 the Philharmonic Association presented a popular play called The Spirit of 1900, or The Coming Woman. Masquerade balls were frequent, the Philharmonic conducting such an event for the children of the community on May 10, 1890. The Mayer group produced Out In The Streets on April 29, and soon thereafter Professor Mayer was forced to resign from the association because of poor health. J. J. Thompson succeeded him as director of activities, which for a period were restricted to the weekly entertainments prepared for the club members.

J. L. Cain continued to direct activities of the Social Club organization, with a new staff of officers elected in August including S. L. Hebrard, W. J. Sandoz, Maurice Depres, A. Loeb, L. Salmonson, J. Jacobs, and L. M. Firnberg. On October 2 the club assisted "the ladies of Opelousas" in presenting a program at Perrodin's Hall for the benefit of Mrs. Paul Missi, a local resident "... whose circumstances were well known to the public. . . ." The plan of entertainment, according to the St. Landry Democrat for September 27, included a concert, a comedy, a ball and supper. Admission price was twenty-five cents, the established Social Club entrance fee. On November 27 the Club gave its annual Anniversary Ball at Perrodin's Hall and two evenings later, on November 29, presented The Dead Heart, the most difficult play attempted by the group to that date.

The Opelousas audience did not admire the play, and the review in one of the weeklies is cited here as a striking example of dramatic criticism by local editors found frequently among the small town weeklies in Louisiana.

. . . We must say the audience was not pleased with the play. The acting was fair, and particularly so on the part of Mr. Clarke and the comedian but the play itself was not admired. Very few persons of the present day, who are not well versed in the history of France, A. D., 1787 to 1883, can well appreciate the passions and sentiments of a State, that was said to have got "drunk on crime to vomit blood." Then the killing of a man shocked no one who was actively engaged in the scenes of the revolution, now, it is simply revolting to all classes, Yet; to be true history, or, to life, is the peculiar office of tragedy and the drama, and any attempt to illustrate the horrors of the period we have mentioned, by ignoring its distinguishing features, would be farcical and ridiculous. Whilst to represent them as they actually were, must always be revolting to our sensibilities. Such plays, however true to nature and to history, cannot be so rendered as to become admired nowadays.¹⁷²

For two years following the production of The Dead Heart neither the Social Club nor the Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association gave public performances of plays. Both groups maintained their program of social entertainments--masquerade, fancy dress, "twin cap" balls, or parties--and in February, 1892, the women of the Social Club formed the Ladies Auxiliary Association which proposed establishing a club reading room

¹⁷² St. Landry Democrat, December 6, 1890. In chronicling the first production of The Dead Heart in New York in October, 1860, Odell notes a similar audience reaction: ". . . The play, though given a few times, did not achieve the success its stirring situations might have led one to expect; perhaps the main theme, of revenge, especially as it involves a woman victim, is not popular. . . ." (George C. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926-1945), VII, p. 323.)

and library, and ". . . giving of entertainments of a social, literary, and musical nature, and the adoption of such other ways and means as will redound to the improvement of the moral, social and intellectual condition of its members. . . ." ¹⁷³ A new office, that of Hall Manager, was added to the regular staff of the Social Club in 1892, possibly a move on the part of the organization to cope with the annual license fee of \$150 imposed by the town council the preceding year. Aaron Loeb was elected to the office. J. L. Cain, J. J. Perrodin, Nathan Roos, J. T. Skipper, Joseph Firnberg, and John W. Ware were other members of the governing body. J. J. Thompson and A. J. Bercier continued to lead the Philharmonic activities.

In March, 1892, Dr. R. M. Littell completed construction of a two-story building on Main Street designed to house his drug store, and provide a larger hall for public entertainments. "It is the only one of the kind, whose dimensions are entirely sufficient for the accommodations of large audiences," the Democrat editor reported on February 27. The new hall was inaugurated by the Social Club with a grand ball on May 12, at which time a new Opelousas orchestra under the direction of Rudolph Mayer made its debut. Immediately the Social Club assumed responsibility of equipping the new hall with stage and scenery, preparatory to opening the new theatrical season. The Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association in turn engaged the old Perrodin's Hall for its club programs. During the summer months the Courier reported the activities of a newly formed debate club. ¹⁷⁴

The first amateur dramatic performance reported to have taken place

¹⁷³ St. Landry Democrat, March 5, 1892

¹⁷⁴ Courier, June, July, 1892, passim.

on the stage of Littell's Opera House was the Silver Leaf Dramatic Club's Catherine Howard on February 1, 1893. A number of traveling companies had previously appeared, providing a mescellany of entertainments. The Silver Leaf Club was a newly organized Negro group working under the direction of Mrs. Emile Donato, the local teacher who had managed entertainments at her home ten years earlier to raise funds for the school. The dramatic club program was sponsored by and for the benefit of the Negro brass band of Opelousas.

Editorially, the St. Landry Clarion briefly commented in its issue of February 4 that " . . . We must say we were surprised at the ease with which each actor took off his part. Alcest Campbell, in Athelwold, Earl of Northumbland (sic) , deserves special credit. With practice he would make a splendid actor—he has the voice and grace." A more detailed review submitted to the Clarion by "A White Spectator" reported that Littell's Opera House ". . . was filled with a large and appreciative audience, which numbered among it many of our leading white citizens. . ." ¹⁷⁵ Neither the St. Landry Democrat nor the Courier reviewed the play. The Democrat, however, expressed objections to the Silver Leaf Club's use of the opera house when the program was announced late in January.

An entertainment to be given by some of our colored friends is billed to take place next month at Littell's Opera House, the fashionable amusement resort of our best people. Somebody has made a mistake—one which may have deplorable and far-reaching consequences and results—and we feel that we would be derelict in our duty if we failed to sound a note of warning. In all kindness to all concerned we say: Down brakes! Go slow! Beware! ¹⁷⁶

In the newspaper discussions of the controversy which continued through the

¹⁷⁵"Letter to the Editor" St. Landry Clarion, February 4, 1893.

¹⁷⁶St. Landry Democrat, January 28, 1893.

first week in March ¹⁷⁷ the Social Club management of the opera house was criticized for permitting the Silver Leaf Dramatic Club to perform there. In September performances by the Negro group were being presented at St. Laurent Hall, probably a building equipped as a theater for their use.

During the spring of 1893 two events of local amusements were recorded in Opelousas. On March 10 the Opelousas Female Institute sponsored a program of songs, tableaux, a drill, and a "new play, The Woman's Exchange of Simpkinsville, dramatized from an article in a leading February magazine." The Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association revived to stage a "grand opening ball of the season" at Perrodin's Hall on April 4. In its October 7 issue the Clarion carried a brief review of a program by the Silver Leaf Dramatic Club at their hall. Broken Fetters, or The Triumph of Right Over Wrong, presented on September 20, was described as the "second rendition" of the Townsend drama at St. Laurent Hall, which fact indicates that the Negro group was continuing its activities. The audience was good, according to the Clarion report, and Alcest Campbell and James Simms were commended for their work. These performers, with Leonard Manse and Pauline Chevis, who had been given promising commendations for their work in Catherine Howard at Littell's Opera House earlier in the year, formed a stable corps of actors in the club. Nellie Donato provided music for the programs, and Mrs. Emile Donato continued to direct the plays.

Alcest Campbell was employed by the Social Club to serve refreshments to the guests at theatrical performances at Littell's Opera House. His contacts with actors of professional companies and with Opelousas ama-

¹⁷⁷The debate between the Democrat and the Clarion on the subject of the Negro dramatic club's use of the opera house soon evolved into a personal argument between two competing weeklies. (see issues of the St. Landry Democrat and the St. Landry Clarion, January 28 through March 4, 1893).

teurs during their rehearsal periods presumably inspired the young Negro to develop his artistic talents. The Social Club placed Campbell in charge of decorations for the anniversary ball in December. In his comments on the event one local editor observed:

. . . The decoration of the hall, whose superb appearance lent so much grandeur to the ball room scene, reflects much credit upon the genius of Mr. Alcest Campbell, and shows him to be an adept in the decorative art.¹⁷⁸

The early months of 1894 brought an end to the Opelousas Social Club. On the other hand, Thomas P. Bowden returned as director of an amateur production which marked the beginning of a general revival of non-professional activity. The year, therefore, was significant for Opelousas amateurs.

Members of the Social Club, who since 1885 had managed both professional and amateur theatrical activities in Opelousas, during the first week in March reached their decision to disband because ". . . rent and other expenses became too excessive. . . ." ¹⁷⁹ Some of the old group a week later initiated a plan to reorganize the club on an improved financial basis and thus enable the group to continue its social and literary program in

¹⁷⁸ Clarion, December 9, 1893. Alcest Campbell subsequently became leader of the Silver Leaf Dramatic Club, and was successful in arranging for a second appearance of the group at Littell's Opera House in January, 1895. His position among theater-going people in Opelousas is suggested by two entries in the May 4, 1895 issue of the Clarion. B. F. Anderson and Isidore Isaac having been awarded concession privileges on an excursion train sponsored by the volunteer fire department, the Clarion reported that "Alcest Campbell, who dispenses the refreshments at all our swell balls, has been secured for the occasion, and the ladies can rest assured they will be given the most polite attention." Again commenting on Campbell's artistic abilities, the editor wrote: "The decoration of the Opera House for the Trilby Ball next Wednesday night is a paragon of decorative elegance, and is a credit to the artistic ability of Mr. Alcest Campbell who did the work. . . ."

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., March 10, 1894.

the community. They established a monthly membership dues of fifty cents. They opened eligibility for membership to all interested citizens, the former club having restricted its members "to young people." It proposed adding an active literary department, ". . . with a view of promoting social amusement, and cultivating literary tastes."¹⁸⁰ The new group elected Isaac Roos, Lee Garland, S. L. Hebrard, J. J. Perrodin, Eddie L. Loeb, and J. T. Skipper to its staff of officers. The new club sponsored a successful May Ball; however, sufficient interest was lacking, and the organization collapsed.

Thomas P. Bowden, the popular local comedian during the early 1880's, directed a performance of Clouds at the Opera House on April 11 for the benefit of the Opelousas Convent. Reserved seats were priced at seventy-five cents, general admission was fifty cents. Despite the slight advance in the price of tickets, a large audience attended the play in which fourteen amateurs took part. In November the Philharmonic Association sponsored a production of the play Border Land under a new director, Charles P. White. Frank J. Deitlein, T. P. Bowden, and Remi Wallior, actors of known ability, appeared in the cast with a number of new performers. In addition to White, new names in the acting corps were John W. Lewis, Henry Pavy, Mason McBride, Annie Andrus, Lucille Lacombe, Blanche Lacombe, and Annie Gordon. A week later, on November 16, the company repeated the play at Grand Coteau.

These amateurs met at the opera house on December 6 and organized the Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club of Opelousas. As reported by the Courier, the purpose of the new club was "to afford entertainment to the public." To direct activities the group set up an executive committee

¹⁸⁰Ibid., March 17, 1894. (See Also Opelousas Courier, same date.)

of nine members, including the elected officers of the club. J. T. Skipper was elected president; Charles Grant Shaffer, a young Harvard graduate who in October came to Opelousas as principal of the high school, was elected vice president; and Nathan Ross, secretary-treasurer. Serving with these three on the Executive Committee were A. L. Lacombe, Charles P. White, Frank J. Deitlein, Thomas P. Bowden, Lolie Dupre, and Mrs. J. T. Skipper.¹⁸¹

The Philharmonic Association provided two entertainments during December: a grand ball at Perrodin's Hall on the 11th and a club production of Crawford's Claim at Littell's Opera House on December 31. In announcing the scheduled appearance of Belle Gilbert with the Gustav Frohman Company in Opelousas on January 21, opera house manager Adolphe Jacobs for the first time stated that reserved seats for Negroes would "be provided for those who desire to attend."¹⁸² In the same issue of the Clarion Jacobs announced that the Silver Leaf Dramatic Club, now under the direction of Alcest Campbell, would present Catherine Howard at the Opera House on January 28 "for colored people only," and that Campbell had been requested to give the play at a later date for white people. A review of the Negro club's performance on January 30 suggests that the group may have given the play for Negroes on the 28th and followed two nights later with a second presentation for the white audience. Comments indicate that the performance was of substantial quality.

The presentation on Wednesday night (January 30) by the Silver Leaf Dramatic Club, of the tragic drama, Catherine Howard,

¹⁸¹Courier, December 8, 1894. (See St. Landry Clarion, same date.)

¹⁸²Clarion, January 13, 1895.

or the Throne, the Tomb and the Scaffold, was a splendid amateur success, and shows that their [sic] exists in Opelousas among the better element of the colored people, talent, which, with proper cultivation, would attain to a high order of merit. The acting of Mr. Alcest Campbell, the manager, and leading character of the play, was very fine, and of an order that is seldom excelled even by professional talent usually seen in the large towns. These colored people deserve all the encouragement that can be accorded them.¹⁸³

The Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club gave its first performance at Littell's Opera House on February 16. Won Back, a drama of the Civil War period in which the author "allotted all the high and ennobling [sic] roles to friends of the Union, while the most ridiculous and contemptible role was assigned to a defender of the South . . .," was new to the Opelousas audience. The play proved to be a selection characteristic in quality among the pieces produced by the new dramatic club during the next two years.

The Clarion review of the initial effort of the Jeffersons was general.

. . . Taken as a whole, the play was fairly well rendered, and while not the success it should have been, still it demonstrated the fact that the club has much good material in its membership, which, with more careful training would give a highly creditable performance. . . .^{183a}

The Courier, after commenting on the suitability of the play, wrote in detail of the individual performers:

. . . We can find no words strong enough to express our admiration for the ennobling sentiments uttered by the hero and heroine and for the beautiful language in which they were clothed. These were irreproachable; and the same may be said of the acting of the heroine, Miss Gabrielle Hebrard, whose clear and audible enunciation, perfect naturalness and charming savoir faire on the stage we have had more than one occasion to laud and commend. Prof. Shaffer, the hero, acquitted himself very creditably, and so did Dr. Irion and Messrs. Bowden, Roos, Lewis and Frank Dietlein [sic]--Mr. Lewis especially taking off his difficult (and despicable) part in a capital manner. But

¹⁸³Ibid., February 2, 1895.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., February 23, 1895.

But we would not be entirely frank did we not add that the honors of the evening rested with the ladies. Miss Pussie Pitot, Miss Lelle Dupre and Mrs. Irion--to say nothing of Miss Hebrard whose talent as an amateur performer is altogether hors ligne and who would attract attention on any stage--performed the parts assigned them in a manner which not only charmed the audience but agreeably surprised their friends and earned for them the undisguised admiration of all present. ¹⁸⁴

Opelousas amateur organizations continued active during 1895. The Philharmonic Association presented Imogene, or The Witch's Secret at Perrodin's Hall on April 15, and repeated the performance at Grand Coteau on April 20. Opelousas public school authorities brought to the opera house on May 11 S. S. Hamill, the noted Chicago elocutionist,¹⁸⁵ and his daughter in a recital of "recitations and Shakespeare impersonations" for the benefit of the school library. On May 12 the volunteer fire company sponsored a recreation train excursion to Lake Charles by way of Lafayette, Rayne, and Crowley, a sight-seeing trip to neighboring towns to the west. Three days later the grand Trilby Ball was held at the opera house.

The Joe Jefferson Dramatic Club turned to musical comedy for its second production, presenting Willard Spenser's Princess Bonnie at the opera house on June 7. Again the choice of play marked the alertness with which the leaders of the Opelousas dramatic club planned its activities.

Princess Bonnie had had its premiere only a year before, opening at the

¹⁸⁴Courier, February 23, 1895.

¹⁸⁵According to the Opelousas Courier, May 11, 1895, both Hamill and his daughter were distinguished elocutionists. He was publicized as the author of New Science of Elocution, and according to Mary Margaret Robb's historical study of the teaching methods in oral interpretation of literature, Hamill's Easy Lessons in Vocal Culture, which denounced the gymnastics methods of Delsarte and adhered rather closely to the mechanical teachings of James Rush, was published in 1898. (Mary Margaret Robb, Oral Interpretation of Literature in American Colleges and Universities, (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1941) p. 162.)

Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia on March 26, 1894. According to the Clarion the operetta was scheduled for its first New Orleans performance at the Academy of Music during the 1895-1896 season; thus, the Opelousas performance was probably one of the first amateur productions of the piece, and perhaps the first time that the operetta was played in the South.¹⁸⁶

In the cast were L. A. Lacombe, Lucas Fontenot, J. T. Skipper, L. H. Bailey, Henry Ross, Ekson McBride, Blanche Lacombe, Sallie Powers, Anita Doremus, and a chorus of twenty-one young singers. Charles Grant Shaffer directed the entire production. New and special scenery was painted for the sets and stage effects were prominent in the production. Rudolph Mayer, J. J. Perrodin, and Mrs. V. K. Irion were the musicians. In their reviews the editors of both the Clarion and the Courier wrote at length of the details of the performance, evaluating individual actors and praising the young Opelousas school principal for his understanding and thorough direction. The Clarion asserted that

. . . To Prof. Chas. Grant Shaffer must be accorded the honor of this success. His thorough knowledge of music, his indefatigable energy and ability as a director was too clearly evinced by the way he managed the performance for anything but praiseworthy criticism. Anyone that undertakes to direct an amateur performance has to undergo the most harrassing circumstances; but we doubt if anyone had to battle with so many obstacles and so successfully overcame them. . . .

Alice Labyoe and Pussie Pitot were accorded much credit for directing the making of costumes and for assisting in directing the stage movements and business of the chorus.¹⁸⁷

The company with scenery and props moved by train to the New Orleans opera house for a performance on June 22, and returned to Littell's in

¹⁸⁶Clarion, May 25, 1895. (also Courier, June 15, 1895.)

¹⁸⁷Ibid., June 15, 1895. (see Courier, same date.)

Opelousas for a second appearance on July 11, at which time the State Convention of Parish Superintendents and the Faculty of the Louisiana Summer Normal School were special guests.

For their second production of 1895 the Philharmonic Association secured the use of the larger Littell's opera house. Again Charles P. White directed the play, The Deacon, or The Interrupted Ceremony, in which five experienced amateurs were joined by seven newcomers to the acting corps. With Lucille Lacombe, Annie Gordon, John H. Harmonson, Remi Wallior, and White, allof whom were reliable performers in earlier plays, James J. Bailey, Eugene Wartelle, Frank Shute, Mary Littell, Ida Veazie, Tillou Andrus, and Helen Sandoz made their first bids for recognition among the host of actors in their home town. The play was farcial comedy. The large cast which included new people was well directed. According to the Clarion review the performance ". . . was in every sense of the word a perfect and complete success, and came up to the expectations of every one present." Following the performance at Opelousas on September 23, the group went to Crowley for an appearance on October 2.

Completing one of the most active and rewarding years of theater activity, members of both of Opelousas' amateur clubs joined in a benefit performance for the Presbyterian Ladies Aid Society on December 4. The Deestrick Skule At Blueberry Corners, a burlesque of the schools of "ye olden time" with a cast of twenty-eight people, at Littell's Opera House was enjoyable entertainment not only because of the caricatures but also because of the familiar Opelousas business men and matrons seen acting the parts in costumes of the colonial period.

By the close of 1895 Littell's Opera House, under the management of

Adolphe Jacobs, had established a somewhat more stable reputation. Traveling professional troupes played in Opelousas with greater regularity. In January, 1896, the management began publication of an "official programme," which contained visiting casts, facts concerning the organization and management of the troupes and advertisements of local business firms. According to the Clarion the opera house programme compared "very favorably with those issued by the city theatres."¹⁸⁸ In February Dr. R. M. Littell announced the sale of the opera house to Leonce Sandoz, Opelousas journalist and former editor of the St. Landry Democrat, for \$3200 cash. Since the ground floor of the two-story building housed Littell's drug store and possibly other business establishments, the sale of the second floor theater incurred probable details of mutual agreement which were not published in the announcement. The theater became known as the Sandoz Opera House, however, and Adolphe Jacobs continued as the manager.

On June 12, the Joe Jefferson Dramatic Club presented The Little Tycoon, another Willard Spenser operetta. Charles Grant Shaffer directed the play and Rudolph Mayer conducted the orchestra. Henry Roos, James J. Lewis, Mason McBride, Lucas Fontenot, Olympe Laas, Mamie L. Casse, and Anita Doremus appeared in the cast. Peter Casse, a new member of the club, was scheduled to play a leading role; illness during late rehearsals necessitated a change, and Phil L. Asher, an experienced actor who had been active in non-professional theater in Alexandria in 1893, made his first appearance with the Opelousas amateurs as a substitute. A similar change of personnel in the orchestra was necessary when Mrs. V. K. Irion, pianist, was absent because of illness in her family. Stella Chretien filled in

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., January 11, 1896.

admirable with less than a week's rehearsals. In the June 12 issue of the Courier the production was advertised as having a "Chorus of Thirty Voices. Elaborate Costumes, Graceful Dances, New Scenery and Charming Music." Although the Little Tycoon, "a satire on the foreign title worship craze," did not arouse the same amount of enthusiasm in the audience as Spenser's Princess Bonnie a year earlier, the Clarion editor reassured the participants by writing that" . . . it is not extraordinary, though, that the impersonation of certain phases and flibles ~~[sic]~~ of human nature reaches the popular fancy and evokes enthusiasm, while others equally well presented do not to the same extent. . . .¹⁸⁹

During the summer Charles Grant Shaffer taught in the Summer Normal School at Shreveport. From there he accepted a position at the Louisiana State Normal School in Natchitoches, and the Opelousas dramatic club was without a director.¹⁹⁰ Before the group could adjust itself and get another play ready for performance, the year had passed.

On January 8, 1897, "local amateurs" presented Above The Clouds at Sandoz's Opera House, the first of several local entertainments given during the first six months of the year. People participating in the play were predominantly Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club members. The director of the play was not indicated, and the lack of close organization seemed evident.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., June 20, 1896. (see also Courier, same date.)

¹⁹⁰ The Board of Administrators of the State Normal School elected Shaffer to the position of Professor of Latin and Science, to succeed Professor B. C. Caldwell, who at the time was elected to the Presidency of the school. In 1897, Shaffer moved to Calcasieu Parish where for several years he was principal of the Lake Charles Central High School.

James J. and John W. Lewis, Blanche and Lucille Lacombe, Olympia Laas, Edward Klotz, Charles T. Bienvenu, Lucas Fontenot, Lillie Hannanson, Austin Fontenot, and A. J. Dupuy appeared in the cast. Phil Asher gave comic impersonations between acts. Charles T. Bienvenu, a young Opelousas druggist, made his debut with the amateurs in this play. His work as a comedian was surprisingly satisfactory, according to the Clarion editor's comments, and he appeared consistently in later productions. On January 16 the company presented Above the Clouds at Lafayette for the benefit of the high school there.

Essentially the same people appeared in the Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club production of Twixt Love and Money at Sandoz's Opera House on February 22. The program was given as a benefit for drouth sufferers in north Louisiana, and netted \$211.40 for the project. Although the play was given under the sponsorship of the Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club, that organization remained without a director with leadership qualities sufficient to merit his being identified with the production. The amateurs continued working in occasional programs; however, Twixt Love and Money was the last appearance of the Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club as an organization.

In March an attempt was made by citizens of Opelousas to form a new Literary, Scientific, and Education Society. The temporary organization set up a committee to formulate a constitution and by-laws for the Society and held its second meeting on April 1 at the parish courthouse to receive the committee's recommendations and adopt regulations. A heated debate over one section of the proposed constitution which ". . . prohibited dancing in the club hall, or the giving of dances under the auspices of the club. . . ." resulted in the group's breaking into two opposing factions, neither

of which could effect an organization.¹⁹¹

The May Day Fête Champêtre produced at the Opelousas Sunnyside Park Race Track was doubtless the crowning point of amateur amusement efforts during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Built in a fifteenth century Spanish setting, the program was planned and directed by Dr. Fred J. Mayer, an Opelousas physician, illustrating his idea of effectively teaching historical events by example. Elements comprising the program included in chronological order, the procession of the Spanish Court to the Throne at Barcelona, an original play of Columbus's return after his voyage of discovery, a grand tournament in the manner of 14th century chivalry as adapted in the southern United States since the Civil War, a Pages' tournament, miscellaneous athletic games including the American Indian game of racquette, and the grand coronation ball.

A grand amphitheater-like arrangement was followed in providing for the audience of two thousand people who attended. On one side of the race track course were bleachers. Midway and in front was the throne, and in

¹⁹¹St. Landry Clarion, April 3, 1897. In reviewing the elaborate field pageant held on May 1 in which all elements of the community were represented, the same weekly wrote: "It was demonstrated that in despite of the undercurrent of opposition and cold water all factions and creeds can come together, forget politics and religion, and spend harmoniously a pleasant and instructive day even in St. Landry (parish). Evidence of the changing attitude toward dancing in the community thus came into prominence suddenly. During the period beginning in 1880, the volunteer fire department in 1882-1883 bought its equipment with funds raised through a series of public balls; the Philharmonic Association and the Opelousas Social Club maintained a community interest in their organizations by means of regularly scheduled masquerade and fancy dress balls which continued into the early years of the 1890's.

front of the throne between the bleachers and the course was a great low pavilion for the coronation ball. All tournament officials, pages, knights, and the principals in the play wore fifteenth century Spanish costumes. For the seventeen maids of honor to the Spanish Queen and members of court special costumes were rented at great expense for the performance. Anticipating the difficulty of the large audience in hearing the play, Dr. Mayer had complete librettos printed to distribute among those seated at a distance from the stage. To provide prizes for the winners of the various contests, Mayer and his assistants charged entry fees of two dollars of all knights and one dollar of all athletes participating in the games. General admission to the pageant was fifty cents, with children being admitted for half price. The coveted first prize of the tourney, the crown to be worn by the Queen of Love and Beauty at the coronation ball, was made by Remi Mornhinveg, an Opelousas jeweler. Its design followed ". . . a scheme of hearts and spears, in pursuance of the ancient pattern, and a solid sterling silver spur, with the inscription: 'Opelousas, La., May 1, 1493.'

In narrating the train of events in the May 8 issue of the Clarion the editor wrote:

. . . When 2 o'clock arrived the commodious grand stand was literally packed, and vehicles to no end were drawn up in line along the track. The excursion from New Orleans had contributed quite a number to the audience, but the greater portion was from the town and surrounding country. Everything was made ready for the reception of the King and Queen with their train. The maids of honor composed (of) Misses Ella Richard, Fannie Thompson, Louise Randall, Marguerite Zoder, Olympe Laas, Malou Lastrapes, Fannie and Lucille Dupre, Lucille Estorge, Mattie Shute, Lizzie Blackshear, Helen Lacombe, Rena McKinney, Pearl Harmanson, Sidonia Simon, Lucy Hopkins, of Lafayette, and Louise Gonsoulin, of Jeanerette, looking entrancing in their rich costumes, were seated around the throne awaiting the arrival of their Majesties.

At half past two o'clock the procession entered in the gates in the following order: Royal Band; Trumpeter (A. C. Skiles); Field and Grand Marshals (Sheriff Isaac Broussard, of Lafayette, and Dr. Fred J. Mayer); King and Queen of Spain (Mr. Nathan Roos and Miss Annie Andrus), their sedan chair borne by eight negroes in Moresque costumes; Court Jester on an ass (Chas. T. Bienvenu); Cardinal (John W. Lewis); Boabdil, the last of the Moorish Kings (J. J. Lewis); Christopher Colon, discoverer of America (Phil L. Asher); Friar (Austin Fontenot); Knights (Lee Garland, Chas. F. Garland, J. J. Thompson, Alfred Deville, Ambroise Vidrine, J. C. Puckett, Albert and Eddy Dejean, Wm. Davis, Don Soileau, J. J. Lewis, Arthur A. Comeau, Albert Fontenot, Henry Lastrapes, A. J. Dupuy)

The royal party took their positions on the stage. The knights on horseback formed a semi-circle around the back of the throne, and the play, Christopher Colon at the Court of Barcelona, began. According to Dr. Mayer who wrote the play, only the role of Jocco the court jester, was his own creation. The other characters and events in the drama were based on historical fact. Some indication of the content of the play is suggested by the following brief review printed in the New Orleans Daily Picayune, May 3, 1897:

. . . The dramatic part of the programme, which lasted about an hour, was a play in which the historical unities were faithfully preserved. The grasping ambition of Ferdinand of Aragon, the desire of the Spaniards for gold, the religious fervor of Isabella and Columbus were all delineated. The central figures, Ferdinand and Isabella, Boabdil and Colon, had nearly all the talking to do, except Jocco, the funny man, who kept the throng in a roar by his sallies. Colon gave a short account of his first voyage, after which, in pursuance of the historical fact, the "Te Deum" was played. . . .

Don Ambroise Vidrine was victor in the tourney which followed, having run the course in nine and three-quarters seconds and taken nine rings out of ten; to him therefore, went the crown and the privilege of naming and crowning the Queen of Love and Beauty at the coronation ball in the evening. The pages' tourney for boys, the winner of which was to

choose his May Queen from among the high school girls attending the ball, and the athletic contests concluded the afternoon program. According to the Daily Picayune story, ". . . A most unique feature of the festival, gotten up for the especial benefit of the New Orleans visitors, was an Indian game of racquette by the Faquetatique braves. . . ." The Indian athletes appeared under the direction of Chief Fusilier of Prairie Faquetatique, with whom the tournament management made special arrangements.¹⁹²

In the evening the coronation ball was held with a "pyrotechnic display" at the park pavilion. "The Royal Cotillion was danced by the Court Officers and Knights, and at eleven o'clock the Grand Tourney and Fête Champêtre adjourned. . . ."

One local editor's tribute to Dr. Fred J. Mayer, who conceived the idea of the pageant and carried it through, adds particular information concerning the objective and scope of the event:

. . . This was no ordinary tournament, with horse play alone. It was the experimental stage of an original idea thought out long years ago by Dr. Mayer of teaching the leading epochs and events in history by an object lesson; teaching it in a manner pleasing to people who are not fond of didactic lectures, but who like the spectacular. A much cheaper show could have been gotten up with calico and tinsel, but it would not have taught as effectually the exact costuming of the 14th and 15th century. The armor of the Grand Marshall belonged to the 15th century, being very much like the one worn by Richard Couer de Leon sic before Acre in Palestine.¹⁹³ The regalia and swords were all exact reproductions of ancient

¹⁹²Clarion, April 24, 1897.

¹⁹³Richard I, known during the Crusades as "Couer de Lion," was king of England late in the 12th century (1189-1199). Acre, the Palestine seaport, was besieged by Crusaders in 1191.

models; the one worn by the King being a counterpart of the sword of Charlemagne, [sic] in the museum of the Louvre. The costumes were made in Paris, and represented an outlay of over \$1000. . . .¹⁹⁴

During the closing week of May the high school pupils appeared in The Flower Queen, a musical play. Anita Doremus directed the program. A group of amateurs led by Charles T. Bienvenu, Nathan Roos, Mason McBride, Eddie L. Loeb, and Rami Wallior, gave Horace Dale's melodrama Strife at the opera house for the benefit of the Opelousas Convent on June 9. Phil Asher was again called on to substitute for one of the actors during the last week's rehearsals, and a vocal quartet composed of Marguerite Zoder, Mattie Loeb, Annie Andrus, and E. L. Loeb sang between acts. The troupe repeated the play at Lafayette on June 28, the performance being the last for the amateurs during 1897.

Leonce Sandoz improved the opera house in the meantime, adding a suspended balcony to increase the seating capacity of the theater to "between 500 and 600." In August the owner placed an order with Cox Brothers, New Orleans scenic artists, for set of new stage scenery and a new drop curtain.

There is no record of non-professional theatrical activity in Opelousas during 1898. In April, 1899, however, T. D. Harris, the local high school principal, directed the amateurs in three performances for the Ruston Chautauqua fund. The Rio Grande, a western melodrama, was given at Sandoz's opera house on April 18. In addition to Harris who also acted in the play, the cast included Jonas Roos, John Harmanson, Percy T. Ogden, Edward L. Loeb, Fernand Voorhies, Manson McBride, Lelle Dupro, Olympia Laas, Cussie Faunt LeRoy, and Josie Williams. The company went

¹⁹⁴St. Landry Clarion, May 3, 1897.

to Washington for a performance on April 25, and moved to Grand Coteau for a final appearance the following evening. Many of the same actors worked in the cast of Alabama which was given on June 27 for the benefit of the Convent. Rudolph Mayer's orchestra provided music for the program, the final non-professional production recorded in Opelousas before 1900. Ogden, Loeb, Roos, Voorhies, Gussie Faunt LeRoy, Josie Williams, Lelle Dupre, Olympia Laas--members of the earlier Chautauqua play cast--were joined by R. H. Firnberg, J. J. Bailey, Lorenzo Mornhinveg, and John Ogden, Jr., in presenting the play with a Southern setting before a large opera house audience. The Clarion reported that ". . . the house was crowded to its utmost capacity, and the audience showed its appreciation of the superb acting by frequent and loud applause."¹⁹⁵

Thus ended the last twenty-year period of theatrical activity in Opelousas, a period marked by intervals of capable direction and leadership by Simon Richard, Rudolph Mayer, Charles Grant Shaffer, and Thomas P. Bowden. Never during the period was Opelousas without a numerous corps of experienced amateur actors, and directors were constantly adding to that number by casting promising young people in their plays. Organized theater groups--The Social Circle, the Philharmonic Association, the Social Club, the Philharmonic Literary and Dramatic Association, the Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club--frequently undertook the production of new and original plays and operettas which marked the non-professional theater in Opelousas as one of the most productive centers in the state.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., July 1, 1899.

Miscellaneous Communities

Amateur dramatic clubs were active in at least twelve other small communities in the Bayou Teche area between 1880 and 1900. A number of these community groups are identified by single bits of correspondence published in the weekly newspapers of the larger towns; of other groups fragmentary information of their work over a number of years appeared in the weeklies.

The Literary and Dramatic Club of Broussard, Lafayette Parish, was organized in 1896 by Edward Estorge, a former resident of Opelousas. On April 12 "a musical and dramatic entertainment, with Olympic sports. . . ." was sponsored by the club for the benefit of the building fund of the Catholic Church.¹⁹⁶ The editor of the St. Martinville Messenger acknowledged in its issue of January 28, 1888, receipt of the invitation of the Loreauville Dramatic Association to attend its first performance. Their Cornus Club was active in 1895. On June 16 the dramatic troupe of the club presented a program of plays and music at the St. Martinville theater. Kind to a Fault, a two-act English play, and Le Piano de Berthe, a French one-act play; tableaux, vocal music, and selections by the Neuville String Band composed the program. Writing of the performance, the Messenger observed that ". . . the plays, French and English, were well interpreted . . . The tableaux were very exquisitely [sic] beautiful and lovely, the grouping and posing of the subjects were perfect, and the light intelligently managed. . . ."

W. B. Gray, publisher of the Morgan City Free Press in 1880, was manager of Whitney Hall, the town theater. In July the theater was under-

¹⁹⁶Opelousas Courier, April 4, 1896.

going repairs, and in the issue of July 22 of his weekly Gray advertised that the hall was available ". . . for Balls, Concerts, Skating Parties, Pairs & Theatrical Entertainments. . . ." On June 3 and 4, 1887, W. B. Gray, "a comedian of the first order," appeared as Col. M. T. Elevator in Thibodaux productions of Our Boarding House.¹⁹⁷ The Morgan City journalist's reputation as an amateur performer probably grew out of community productions of his own town; however nothing is known of those probable activities. From the April 18, 1889, issue of the Free Press it is known that the J. P. B. Wilmer Guild was an active women's organization which had in rehearsal selections for a "grand dramatic and musical and soiree entertainment" scheduled for Whitney Hall on April 24. On December 13 and 14 the Cora Van Tassel professional troupe played at Whitney Hall, one of the plays being The Little Sinner.¹⁹⁸ It seems probable that Morgan City had an active theater, both amateur and professional, comparable to other Bayou Teche communities during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

At Morrow, a small community in northern St. Landry parish, the citizens organized the Social and Improvement Club. An April 14, 1899, presentation of Hick'ry Farm is the only production of the group recorded in available weeklies. The Morrow public school house served as theater. Miss A. C. Scott directed the play, and Miss M. E. Scott painted the exterior set for the stage. In the cast were L. J. Bond, E. Mixer, O. L. Bell, J. H. Jackson, G. C. McClaren, J. W. Rice, L. McCleish, Eva Jackson and Rosa Mixer.

¹⁹⁷Thibodaux Sentinel, May 28, June 4, 11, 1887.

¹⁹⁸Morgan City Review, December 14, 1889.

Similarly, single performances were recorded at Perry's Bridge in Vermilion parish, at Rayne in Acadia, and at Royville near Abbeville. The Perry's Bridge Dramatic Society announced plans for a dramatic entertainment and ball at their hall on December 19, 1885, the initial performance of the organization.¹⁹⁹ In June, 1888, Charles E. Petrie, the manager of the Rayne Dramatic and Literary Club gained publicity for his club by sending complimentary tickets to the editors of the St. Martinville Messenger and the Abbeville Meridional. The dramatic entertainment for June was scheduled on the 30th for the benefit of the Rayne public school. By 1894 Rayne had provided a theater known as Capel's Opera House. Amateurs were scheduled to produce a play there on December 30, 1894.²⁰⁰ In 1896 the citizens of Royville formed the Royville Comedy Company, who on August 2 gave a minstrel performance at Erath for the benefit of the Royville church. On the following November 8 the company performed at Delcambre's Hall, Derouen, Louisiana, a neighboring community, the program consisting of a French comedy entitled Le Chalet, an interlude entitled A Negro Stratagem, and a farce called A Sunday Law Case. C. S. Young directed the Royville Comedy Company productions, and members who appeared in the casts of the plays given at Derouen included E. O. LeBlanc, Judge H. Freeman, S. Bernard, R. O. Bernard, A. J. Comeau, E. Comeau, R. H. Broussard, H. Boulet, and H. Davis. At Ville Platte in Evangeline parish, the Social Club provided entertainment for the community during 1887. The April 2 issue of the Opelousas Courier announced distribution of posters publicizing "a grand Theatrical and Variety Entertainment and Ball"

¹⁹⁹Abbeville Meridional, December 19, 1885

²⁰⁰Opelousas St. Landry Clarion, December 29, 1894.

to be given by the Ville Platte Social Club on April 10. A new organization was formed in 1896 known as the Evangeline Literary and Dramatic Society of Ville Platte.²⁰¹

Dramatic activities in Grand Coteau, Jeanerette, Lafayette, and Washington gained more frequent mention in the weekly newspapers of the area during closing decades of the nineteenth century. At Grand Coteau St. Charles College discontinued its practice of giving public entertainments, and the citizens of the little village organized dramatic clubs at intervals to provide amusements and give financial aid to local religious and civic groups. On December 25 through 27, 1885, the Catholic Church sponsored a fair and dramatic entertainment in "the Old Church." Marriage A Lottery, a two-act comedy was given during the fair, and the cast included Dr. E. S. Barry, J. Ogey, E. V. Barry, Annie Smith, Nellie Haw, and Marie and Kate Barry. The St. Charles College band provided music and admission to the performance was twenty-five cents. By 1887 Grand Coteau had organized the Merry-Makers Association and had equipped a theater designated as Merrymakers' Hall. On May 25 the club gave a performance of Lady of Lyons, and on June 18 the troupe gave the play at Perrodin's Hall in Opelousas for the benefit of the Grand Coteau library. The company played to a crowded audience and did well in their interpretations of the various roles. The Opelousas Courier editor noted in the performance a lack of effective scenery:

. . . We would say that all of the young ladies and gentlemen were well up in their parts, showing a fine conception of their roles, and that the piece went off smoothly to the close. Now and then there was a little too much emotion and then not quite enough, but this was

²⁰¹ Opelousas St. Landry Clarion, March 14, 1896.

²⁰² Opelousas Courier, June 25, 1887.

to be expected in non-professionals, and therefore calls for no hypercritical comment. The stage settings and accessories were insufficient and did not aid in illustrating the play or to heighten the glamour of the foot lights. This was a decided drawback to a striking presentation, which otherwise, would have given the plucky amateurs a stronger support in carrying a difficult plot to a more forcible solution. They did well and highly entertained the audience, but with more study and better stage scenery they can and will do better.²⁰²

On August 7 the Lafayette Social Club gave a "dramatic performance" at Grand Coteau which was reported as "a perfect success." Early in 1888 the Jolly Crew, a minstrel organization, gave a program called Grand Ethiopian Drama at Bellevue Hall in the Bellevue community on April 10. On October 21 the Breaux Bridge Dramatic Society appeared at Merry-makers' Hall for a program. The Social Glass was given by the Merry-makers early in 1889, and on February 6 the troupe took the play to Bellevue Hall for a performance. Other performances known to have been given at Grand Coteau were by visiting dramatic clubs; however, the local club no doubt continued its activities since on October 17, 1891, a grand ball was given at Merry-makers' Hall for the benefit of "the stage scenery fund."²⁰³ On November 15, 1894, the Opelousas amateurs directed by Charles P. White, gave Border Land at Grand Coteau. Henry Pavy, a former resident of the little college town, appeared in the cast. On April 20 the following year the Opelousas Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association appeared at Merry-makers' Hall in Imogene. The final performance recorded at Grand Coteau was the play Rio Grande by Opelousas

²⁰²Opelousas Courier, June 25, 1887.

²⁰³Ibid., October 17, 1891.

amateurs under the direction of T. H. Harris. The play was given on April 26, 1899, for the benefit of the Ruston Chautauqua.

Earliest record of non-professional theatrical activities in Jeanerette, Iberia Parish was by the Jeanerette Thespian and Debating Society which was organized in April, 1873. G. Harris was the first president of the club and J. J. Lemon served as secretary. The New Iberia Sugar Bowl reported a grand masked ball given by the club at the new public school house. J. Briddell, O. Webber, P. White, and J. F. Brittain served as a management committee for the event. Two weeks later, on April 24, Miss Helmina Plough gave a concert which was followed by a ball. By June the society had built and equipped a stage in the new school building and on the 26th a group of members identifying themselves as the Jeanerette Evening Star Minstrels gave a rehearsal performance of minstrel routines including two farces, The Dentist Shop and Barnum's Last Ball. The program was scheduled for public performance on July 9, admission to which was priced at fifty cents.²⁰⁴ The Variety Club, a new dramatic organization, was formed in 1877. Firemen's Hall, a two-story frame building which was completed in 1885, provided the community with its first theater. The Jeanerette Dramatic Society which was active during 1887 presented both French and English plays at its performances. The society was scheduled to appear at French Hall in Abbeville on October 15 and 16. In 1894 the Young Men's Pleasant Past Time Club directed community entertainments; the Weekly Iberian editor acknowledged receipt of a complimentary ticket to the "season's Hop" to be held at the Jeanerette Opera House on August 16. The last play re-

²⁰⁴New Iberia Sugar Bowl, April 17, July 3, 1873.

ported by the amateurs of Jeanerette was reviewed in the New Iberia Weekly Iberian. Rio Grande was the play, and its presentation on May 5, 1899, was for the benefit of the Catholic Church. Admission was fifty cents with ten cents extra for reserved seats. The amateurs played to "a full house." In the cast were J. P. Robin, W. B. Hale, a local teacher, P. Potest, J. G. Mora, P. Pozzi, R. McCullough, R. Webster, and Misses F. Farmer, M. Harrop, J. McCullough, and M. Rader.²⁰⁵

In 1887 Lafayette had a theater, known as Faulk's Hall; it had an amateur dramatic club, known as the Lafayette Social Club. Information concerning non-professional theatrical activity there during the closing decades of the nineteenth century is fragmentary. Breaux Bridge Literary and Gymnastic Club, whose productions were usually in French, appeared at Faulk's Hall on April 30. On the following August 7 the Lafayette Social Club took one of their plays to Merrymakers' Hall in Grand Coteau. In 1890 the Lafayette Dramatic Educational Association, under the leadership of E. G. Voorhies was the active dramatic organization. On December 14 the association program for the benefit of the public school included a French play entitled Agnes De Verre, a ball, and special music by the Loreauville band. In May, 1895, the Dramatic Educational Association renewed its organization, at which time William Campbell was elected president and Henry Vander Cruyssen became stage manager. Homer and C. O. Mouton were chosen association secretary and treasurer, respectively. Vander Cruyssen had directed the Breaux Bridge Literary and Gymnastic Club until his weekly newspaper plant was burned

²⁰⁵New Iberia Weekly Iberian, May 13, 1899.

in a fire which destroyed the Breaux Bridge theater on February 5, 1893. Having moved to Lafayette and become director of the local dramatic club, Vander Cruyssen invited the Breaux Bridge club to appear on the first program of the Lafayette organization on May 27. The guest club presented Une Mère, a French drama.²⁰⁶ In 1896 Lafayette amateurs formed a minstrel company which was scheduled to perform on June 28 for an Abbeville Excursion party. The place of the performance, according to the advertisement, was the opera house in Opelousas:

. . . Grand Excursion, Sunday, June 28th, Abbeville and intermediate points to Opelousas . . . The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, will run their seventh annual excursion on the above date. No intoxicating drinks will be sold on the train. Baseball, Bicycle Races, Cook Fights, and other amusements.

Grand Performance at 2 o'clock at Opera House by the Lafayette Minstrel Co.

Round trip from Abbeville, \$1.50. Train will leave this place at 8 a.m.; arrive at Opelousas at 10:35 a.m. returning at 6 p.m. . . .

On January 16, 1897, the Opelousas Dramatic Club gave a performance of Above the Clouds in Lafayette for the benefit of the public High School, and on June 23 another group of Opelousas amateurs presented Strife at the Lafayette opera house. These were the final performances recorded in Lafayette by weekly newspapers in neighboring towns before 1900.

Washington, Louisiana, located six miles north of Opelousas in St. Landry Parish, was a community of particular commercial importance before the Civil War and during the Reconstruction Period. Situated at the head of navigation on Bayou Courtableau, Washington was the nearest shipping point to Opelousas and the rich surrounding agricultural area. Frequently touring troupes of professional theater people arrived in Washington

²⁰⁶ Abbeville Meridional June 27, 1896.

on cargo boats, gave entertainments before moving to Opelousas and subsequently south among the Bayou Teche communities. Those coming north on Bayou Teche to St. Martinville or Breaux Bridge, would go overland to Lafayette, Grand Coteau, Opelousas, and to Washington from where they would go to Alexandria on Red River or return by boat from Washington to New Orleans.

Little is known of the non-professional theater in Washington. During the early days the ballroom of the Eagle Hotel was a prominent place of entertainments. Formerly the Galt House, the hotel was purchased by William Ireland in 1855 who renovated the building changing the name to the Eagle Hotel. According to an early advertisement in the Opelousas Courier, the hotel was "situated between the upper and lower Steamboat Landings, fronting the Courtableau."²⁰⁷ Citizens of Washington planned a public ball at the Eagle Hotel on November 20, 1856. The list of managers for the event included J. B. A. Fontenot, A. B. Andrus, M. Kemison, Ulysse Prud'Homme, T. M. Anderson, Omer Peiret, John McCormick, and F. Bowling. The James S. Charles professional theater troupe played in Washington, probably at the hotel or at Odd Fellows' Hall between December 1 and 13, 1856. On January 20, 1857, a vocal and instrumental concert "for benevolent purposes" was planned for Odd Fellows Hall in Washington. W. Miller was director of the program, and admission was one dollar. Spalding & Rogers' Campbell Minstrels, " . . . on tour on their beautiful concert steamer Banjo, "were scheduled at Washington on January 30 and 31, 1858; and H. Buckley & Company's Great National Circus advertised to perform there on April 14 the same year.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Opelousas Courier, January 23, 1858.

²⁰⁸ Opelousas Courier, January 23, April 3, 1858.

Occasionally during the Period of Reconstruction Opelousas Editors mentioned amusements at Washington. A benefit fair and tableaux program was planned for the benefit of the Methodist Church on May 11, 1866. Advanced ticket sales were handled by business firms of the town including Mitchell & Edwards, A Millspaugh, P. Casse, G. Ikleheimer, and Kavanaugh & Gallagher. On February 2, 1869, Ike Harrington's Burlesque Opera and Minstrel Troupe, an amateur group of Washington young people, made a successful debut. The Opelousas Journal announced plans of the company to perform in Opelousas for the benefit of the Washington Catholic Church.²⁰⁹ The music lovers of Washington organized a Philharmonic Society in 1879.

At the beginning of the 1880-1900 period, amateur performances were given at Millspaugh's Hall. Minstrels appeared to be a favorite type of entertainment of Washington audiences. In its issue of February 5, 1881, the Opelousas Courier carried an advertisement of a scheduled program by the Minor Minstrels at Millspaugh's Hall on February 7. Details of the program were suggested by the closing part of the advertisement:

. . . Music, Songs, Dances, Farces, Etc.,
 Ball after Performance. Admission 25 cents.
 Doors open at 6½ o'clock p.m., performance
 begins at 7½.

The same group, referred to as the Black Diamonds and Minor Minstrels, were scheduled to give a complimentary benefit to Will H. Trimble on February 25. Perseverance Fire Company Number One, the Washington volunteer organization, sponsored a benefit entertainment on May 7, 1883.

²⁰⁹ Opelousas Journal, February 6, 1869.

The brief review indicated that "the dramatic entertainment . . . was a very interesting performance, and well patronized by the people."²¹⁰

In 1883 the amateurs of Washington were performing in Perseverance Hall, probably a public hall provided by the volunteer firemen. Rudolph Mayer, the Opelousas musician, organized the Washington Corona Cornet Band among his students, and on October 4 the band assisted in giving an entertainment for the benefit of the Catholic Church. The program was given at Perseverance Hall and consisted of "a drama and concert." In 1889 another minstrel troupe, the Senegambians, was active in Washington. On February 25 the company performed in Opelousas. The Courier of March 2 reported that "there was rather a slim attendance, but the programme was executed in a very creditable manner. . . ." In March the people in Washington organized a social club known as the Washington Philharmonic and Dramatic Association. W. A. Flynn was the first president, and Dr. F. L. Brown and M. A. Schmit were elected stage managers. Other officers included Mrs. O. Lacombe, first vice-president; Mrs. W. A. Flynn, second vice-president; L. J. Derbes, secretary; Louise Dupre, treasurer; and Mary Winn and T. N. Blake, musical directors. Within two weeks after its organization the association had increased its membership to forty-five. The first performance of the group was scheduled for June 12, the program having been postponed from May 29 to await new scenery ordered for Perseverance Hall.²¹¹

On September 18 the Philharmonic and Dramatic Association presented the three-act play Beggar Venus. The performance took place at Dupre's Opera House in Washington. F. F. Chevis and Bella Jacobs were commended

²¹⁰ Opelousas Courier, May 12, 1883.

²¹¹ Ibid., April 6, June 1, 1889.

for their work in the leading roles of the play, and Mrs. W. A. Flynn and Louis Carriere were strong in minor roles, the latter appearing as comedian. Others in the cast were L. J. Derbes, I. L. Jacobs, Charles Brulard, Eleanor Roy, Corinne Derbes, and William A. Flynn. The Corona String Band provided music, and the entertainment closed with a ball.²¹² Two other amateur programs by the Washington amateurs were mentioned in the Opelousas weeklies before 1900. On March 28, 1894, the Ladies' Club was scheduled to give a benefit entertainment for the public school. A variety of numbers were included in the plan: a farce called Poppleton's Predicaments, a Scarf Drill, a Lullaby "to be sung by twenty little girls," and a vocal quartet. Admission was listed as fifty cents. The last entry was that of a minstrel performance given at Sandoz's Opera House in Opelousas on September 6, 1897. Commenting on the event the Clarion editor reported that the performance ". . . surprised and delighted the audience from start to finish. . . . The house was well filled. . . . The singing was a striking feature . . . and we cannot refrain from mentioning the splendid effect of Mr. Frank Zernott's voice upon the audience. . . ."

The very small rural communities in the Bayou Country, as in other sections of the state, supported amateur dramatic clubs during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Professional theater never came to many of these communities; therefore, these organized groups of young citizens--and older people as well--had the responsibility of providing what amusements they had. That clubs from the small communities frequently performed before audiences in the larger towns indicated not only their enthusiastic interest in the theater but also their ability to produce effective entertainment.

²¹²Ibid., September 21, 1889.

Non-professional theater in the larger communities of the Bayou Country was at the peak of productivity during the decade following the Reconstruction period. Theater organizations were more numerous. Volunteer fire companies, church groups, schools, and other local organizations sponsored frequent entertainments. Actors and directors who had served amateur theater apprenticeships during the previous period provided experienced leaders. The amateurs had better theaters and equipment. They chose plays requiring greater skills in all phases of production; consequently they gave greater stress to technical aspects of production: to costumes, stage scenery, and special effects. The amateur theater in the area manifested an overall maturity above that shown at any previous time. Furthermore, it spread out to the smaller communities of the area providing theatrical entertainment for at least thirty-five villages and towns in southern Louisiana.

Organized theater groups in the larger communities were less concerned with providing entertainment for the people than their predecessors were during the Reconstruction period. After 1880 local theatrical groups, like the Progressive Dramatic Association of Plaquemine (1885-1885), organized for "the mutual improvement and social enjoyment. . . ." of their members; like the Poincourtville Dramatic Club (1885-1893), whose object was "charitable. . . pleasing entertainment"; and like the Opelousas Social Club (1885-1894), which purposed only to provide amusement for its members. Objectives were similar among the fifteen other amateur dramatic clubs organized in eight larger communities between 1880 and 1900. The administration of the organizations was conducted chiefly by the president, the business manager, and the stage manager. Memberships were seldom restricted, though the Thibodaux Evergreen Dramatic

Club (1882-1883) and The Men of Mirth (1892-1894) included only young men. Programming gradually changed from the comedy and farce, which gave popular entertainment during the previous period, to full-evening plays; to the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, Planquette, and Spencer; and to variety programs featuring minstrels, children's groups, and music and dramatic recitals. Many capable directors developed among the theater groups of the area. In Plaquemine were Paul Labauve, who directed the Progressive Dramatic Association plays; Tennie Robertson and Ella Bryan, who directed the juvenile dramatic club, The Little Workers (1884-1885); T. B. Ellison, director of the Lotus Club (1887-1888) operettas; and Charles Dupuy, who worked with the Plaquemine Amateur Dramatic Club (1898-1899) at the close of the period. Dr. E. T. Dugas founded the Napoleonville Dramatic Club and directed its plays between 1880-1888. In 1885 he organized the Paineourtville Dramatic Club and directed its activities until 1893. Mrs. Lucille LeBlanc succeeded Dr. Dugas at Napoleonville in 1888 and continued until 1893, reactivating the club again in 1899. I. D. Moore directed the Thibodaux Evergreen Dramatic Club (1882-1883); Henry Vander Cruyssen, the Breaux Bridge Literary and Gymnastic Association (1886-1893); Judge Felix Voorhies, St. Martinville Dramatic Association. Rudolph Mayer was musician, scenic artist, and stage manager for operettas of the Opelousas Philharmonic Association (1879-1882), and the Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association (1888-1895). J. J. Thompson and Charles P. White succeeded him. Charles Grant Shaffer formed and directed the Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club in Opelousas (1894-1896); and in Houma L. C. Moise wrote, directed, and acted with the Houma Dramatic Association (1884-1899). Equally important were many directors of

miscellaneous benefit programs and those who worked with groups in the small towns. T. E. Grace, Mrs. William Schlater, and George A. Coulon in Plaquemine; Mrs. George W. Jones, Mrs. Lizzie C. Sims, and Dr. Charles M. Menville in Napoleonville; Joseph A. and Louis J. Trone', Mrs. J. E. Blanchard, and Mrs. I. D. Moore in Thibodaux; Joseph T. Labit and W. B. White, Abbeville; C. B. and T. M. Anderson, Thomas P. Bowden, and T. H. Harris in Opelousas; Arthur F. LeBlanc, Bayou Goula; John and Lionel Waguespack and Gabriel Pavrot, Convent; Charles S. Larking and J. L. Rusca, Lockport; Dr. A. A. Auccin, Plattenville; and numerous others.

Moreover, these directors during the last decades of the century had better theaters in which to work. The community organization most prominent in providing adequate theaters was the towns' volunteer fire companies. Not only did local firemen sponsor many of the better theatrical productions; they also built theaters in Houma (1886), Plaquemine (1877 and 1885), Napoleonville (1878, 1880, 1888), Plattenville (1887), Jeanerette (1885), and Thibodaux (1883). Theater groups in other towns equipped convenient halls in business houses, and a few communities had privately owned and managed theaters. A number of the better amateur directors also served as scenic artists for their productions. Rudolph Mayer in Opelousas; Dr. T. E. Dugas, Napoleonville; Henry Vander Cruysen, Breaux Bridge; Joseph A. Trone', Thibodaux, were among the more versatile. William Wilson and George A. Coulon, Plaquemine; Charles Gray, Napoleonville, C. E. Addison, Thibodaux; and Miss M. E. Scott, Morrow, designed and executed settings for local productions in their respective communities.

Adding to the variety of theatrical amusement were minstrel troupes, the most outstanding example being the Donaldsonville Amateur Minstrel Company (1887-1892). The chorus of the Poincortville Dramatic Club and Philharmonic Society, directed by Emma Landry (1885-1887), and the Glee Club allied with the Abbeville French Benevolent Society (1880-1883), contributed regular intra-act entertainment at dramatic performances. There is extremely fragmentary information available concerning entertainment for Negro residents; however, at least seven organized Negro amateur theatrical troupes were active at various times in five different southern Louisiana communities.

Professional theater provided by touring companies grew gradually into a more profitable business after private individuals or group committees assumed management of theaters in Plaquemine, Thibodaux, Napoleonville, New Iberia, and Opelousas late in the period. Amateur theater, consequently, declined particularly in quantity. At the close of the century organized non-professional theater groups planned fewer major productions each season, maintaining a degree of their community importance by performing each new play before a home audience and following with performances at various nearby towns for their own amusement or for the financial benefit of a local organization or project.

CHAPTER XII
NORTHEAST LOUISIANA

Lake Providence

The record of non-professional theatrical activity in Lake Providence resumed with the May Day festival sponsored by the volunteer fire company in 1883. At that time Cohn's Opera House had replaced the Firemen's Hall of 1875 as the village theater and center of social activities. The Ivanhoe Dramatic Club was active, and occasional productions by children's groups made distinct contributions to the theatrical fare in the community.

The earliest productions of the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club were presented during the years for which the newspaper files are lost; however, the May Day program was the first of three entertainments recorded during 1883. During the following years the club repeated the general plan of preparing for production rather elaborate programs in the spring, in the summer, and during the last weeks of December. The summer programs, for example, included Comrades in July, 1883; Above the Clouds in July, 1884; and The Social Glass in August, 1887. In December, 1883, two farces, The Two Buzzards and Wanted, a Young Lady, were the plays. Bread Cast Upon the Waters and All in a Fog were presented in December, 1886; and Down by the Sea was the winter production in November, 1887. There is no record available indicating the activity of the club in 1885.

The Ivanhoe Dramatic Club apparently felt obligated neither to provide regular dramatic entertainment to the community nor to furnish a means of income for charity. The members apparently wished

to exercise their dramatic talents for their own enjoyment and recreation. If their efforts were rewarded with sufficient funds to afford worthwhile financial aid to various civic projects, they were pleased to make the donations. For example, the May Day production in 1883 was given for the benefit of the volunteer fire company. Funds from the July production were presented to the Rev. Mr. Philson, of Grace Church, "as a token of appreciation of his services as Pastor in the community, with the compliments and good wishes of the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club."¹ The program of December, 1883, contributed to the Circulating Library fund.

Membership of the club was made up principally of "ladies and gentlemen . . . of business interests" in Lake Providence. The group worked under the direction of J. M. Kennedy, "one of the leading attorneys of the Providence bar." Mrs. Marie L. Garner, for a time the editor of the East Carroll Democrat; Mrs. A. R. Hayes and Wita Purdy, members from Hayes Landing who commuted to rehearsals by Mississippi River steamer; and Joseph E. Ransdell, later United States Senator from Louisiana, were prominent in casts of the Ivanhoe Club productions. Other consistent members of the group included J. S. Guenard, Sam and Joe Kennedy, W. S. Brown, R. L. Jones, Willie Page, Annie Lester, A. J. Porter, Mrs. Joseph Ransdell, Mary McCulloch, F. F. Pilcher, Lillie Taylor, Miss C. Powell, and Nancy Bell.

During the early years of the 1880's the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club gained great popularity among the citizens of the town. Following

¹ East Carroll Democrat, July 14, 1883.

a business meeting on the evening of May 8, 1883, the group was invited to attend a banquet and social hour given by Mrs. Porter in its honor.

There was an abundance of everything the market afforded, and especially TURKEY. Wines flowed freely and toasts were exchanged by the ladies and gentlemen of the Club. The magnificent cake . . . won by Mr. J. S. Guenard at the raffle on Tuesday evening (at the May Day Festival) presented a fine appearance on the elegantly arranged table.²

A typical response from civic and other organizations which benefitted from special dramatic club productions was the card of appreciation from the Providence Fire Company No. 1, published in the local weekly on May 12, 1883:

Hall Providence Fire Co. No. 1, Lake Providence, La., May 7, 1883. . . .

Be it further resolved; that we also tender our thanks to the Providence Dramatic Club . . . for the kind assistance rendered this Company in devoting their time, talent and expense in the performance given by them on the night of May 1st, 1883 which performance was given for the benefit of this Company which contributed so much to its finance and enjoyment of our people. . . .

That the dramatic club enjoyed a liberal community patronage in Lake Providence is evinced further by the frequent letters and reviews to the weekly paper by citizens of the town. These commentaries were complimentary without exception. They discussed the cultural and moral values as justification for the drama in Lake Providence. Frequently they wrote in praise of the actors of the club.

Writing of the production of Comrades, a CLOSE OBSERVER lauded the distinct enunciation and vigorous action with which W. N. Brown interpreted the character of Roy Manning; Mrs. Garner, as May Manning,

² Ibid., May 12, 1883.

performed in a manner that would do "justice to an old professional," and J. S. Guenard and A. J. Porter, Mrs. Hayes and Nita Purdy were consistent. Yancy Bell made his first appearance in this production and was advised by the friendly reviewer to "stick to it," for there was promise of future triumphs. CLOSE OBSERVER noticed the costumes and recorded the fact that those of the ladies were "handsome and tasty and added greatly to the artistic effect of the play." The play itself, the writer believed, was

. . . replete with fine moral sentiment, showing forth the beauties of friendship, gratitude and fidelity, and the punishment which is apt to follow pride and harshness of judgment. . .³

Mrs. Garner read Poe's The Raven to open the program of December 31, 1883. A farce, Wanted, a Young Lady, followed; and then was given a recitative tableau of Tennyson's Dream of Fair Women. F. F. Pilcher gave a ballad, which served as interlude before the concluding farce, Horton's The Two Buzzards. In the report of the program, written for the Democrat by ONE OF THE AUDIENCE, individual amateurs were commended for their performances. Mrs. Garner, Mrs. A. R. Hayes, Guenard, Ransdell, and Pilcher were effective in the farces. Mrs. Garner as Lucretia Buzzard was particularly effective. Tennyson's Dream of Fair Women ". . . for beauty and effect was the crowning glory of the performance." The cast of this unusual feature included Ollie Powell as Helen of Troy, Nita Purdy as Iphigenia, Mary McCulloch as Cleopatra, Mrs. A. R. Hayes as Jephtha's Daughter, and Madge McCulloch as Fair Rosamond. Joseph

³ Ibid., July 14, 1883.

E. Ransdell, as Tennyson, ". . . gained new laurels as an orator."⁴

In a weekly column PRECILLA GRUNDY expressed her frank opinions on the subjects of civic-mindedness, politics, local bar-rooms, and the social clubs. Her commentaries are as much a part of the history of the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club as Director Kennedy, Joe Ransdell, or Marie L. Garner. Always a booster, PRECILLA often inserted paragraphs complimentary of Lake Providence social organizations.

The talent of our brass band has been the subject of wonder and admiration of all strangers who have listened to its strains. . . I know that there is no place without the city limits that has more amusements. We have a finer stage and fixtures than falls to the lot of many towns, and an Amateur Dramatic Club possessing the rare qualifications and talent of always pleasing a critical and cultivated audience. Our literary and social club is yet in its infancy; although the aspirants are just trying their wings, they hope ere long to take lofty flights of eloquence and oratory, and enchant the listeners with the choicest strains of Mendelsohn (sic) and Cound. . . .⁵

On another occasion PRECILLA GRUNDY made use of her knowledge of theater history and drama theory in support of the work of the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club. Commenting GRUNDY began:

I have had a visitation from Samantha--the main object of which seems to have been a desire to make me feel a LITTLE LESS PROUD of the highly inflated puffs the "Dramatis Personae" received on the occasion of our late performance. I acknowledged that the compliments were rather lavishly and munificently bestowed on all sides, but as glory is all we poor amateurs ever hope to receive, in such cases, it were but kind to leave us in complacent possession of our laurels.

We have heard, argues Samantha, that the drama is the truest guide to human conduct because it is the most complete representation of life. That indeed should be its aim; so also was it the aim of Icarus to fly--his province was to pierce the blue ether, but his wings of

⁴ Ibid., January 5, 1884.

⁵ Ibid., August 18, 1883.

wax melted as he approached the sun--and low was his fall. The Greeks first introduced the drama and it sprung, not from the life of man, but from the worship of the Gods. In it man was not represented in action, but in blind, passive obedience to destiny which moulded the fate of mankind. He was simply an instrument to work out the will of the Gods.

The French imitated the Greeks and tried to preserve the unities of time, place and action. The end in view was simply to please the people, to charm the multitude, hence their drama's (sic) bore nothing to wake the deep passions of the soul. Rigidly did they adhere to their models, and the poets, according to the criticism of the Academy, "for fear of sinning against the rules of art, had preferred to sin against the laws of nature."

The moralities though they figured in allegory were more often satires on contemporary events, and became in time so vile that the civil authorities forbade them. The drama fostered superstition for old legends were acted and a natural faith in them, thus inculcated.

Says I--with a widow Bedotte kind of nod--well Samantha, I will give you permission to rest awhile. From the amount of erudition you display, I judge you have prepared this argument for my discomforture. But my dear friend, you are sadly obsolete, deplorably in the rear of the times. It is vain for you to argue from the platform of the dark ages to one of the nineteenth century.

God gave to England, William Shakespeare and his powerful genius has been the lever, which has lifted the depths of its degradation. He had a keen insight into the heart of man, and has brought the varied characters, of his brain in continual procession before us by the living panorama of the stage. We trace the thread and movements from the beginning to the end of life's great problem till virtue triumphs over vice. . . .

The good actor is no less an artist than Michael Angelo or Raphael. The latter represents the exterior man, the mortal body in its grace and symmetry and perfect outline. The former represents the immortal soul, the development of character and the many struggles and temptations of man. From them we learn the priceless lessons of life, and are strengthened, so that we "may rise on stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things."

The feeling elocutionist is an ambassador from the realms of genius; he plays on an instrument grander than lute, harp or psaltery, for the human voice assisted by science and art, can thrill all the deeper emotions of the soul with wondrous power. By the means of training it becomes susceptible of the highest culture; not the culture that merely thrills the senses, but the

broad culture that captivates the intellect and moves the heart in union with the noblest impulses. It can touch the soft, sad chords of sorrow, wake the echoes of mirth, or arouse the soul in indignation. . .

Well I declare, says Samantha! You must be stage-struck; I will say not a word more.

Oh no! Samantha, but your gestures and elocution are so in need of training, I thought my argument might induce you to take lessons, for when we get our literary society what will be your refuge when called upon to entertain?⁶

New members were admitted to the acting group of the club during the following years. B. F. Therrel appeared as Macbeth in scenes from the tragedy produced in July, 1884. Mrs. Garner was Lady Macbeth. Dr. W. H. Davis appeared in the cast of Above the Clouds on the same program and "as the bronzed, sturdy. . . farmer, Amos Gaylord, agreeably surprised the entire audience." H. E. Laroche was the third of the new members in the mid-summer production.

After 1885 fewer of their performances were reported by the local weekly. Those programs which were given for the benefit of civic or religious groups were of community-wide concern and gained brief mention. However, Joseph and Felix Ransdell, J. S. Guenard, and Willie Page continued to form the nucleus of the acting corps. Mrs. Joseph Ransdell frequently appeared in the casts, and W. H. and H. T. Genham and Miss McFarland were added as new members.⁷

A comic opera, under the direction of Prof. Borneman, was planned for performance February 22, 1887. The cast included some of Lake Providence's "best amateur talent" and the proceeds were to be

⁶ Ibid., July 21, 1883.

⁷ Ibid., December 25, 1886

devoted to charitable purposes.⁸ Similarly, the Methodist ladies enlisted the best talent that the town afforded to appear in The Social Glass on August 30. The Democrat announced the following week that "circumstances beyond our control prevented us taking in the Social Glass on Tuesday night."⁹

An all-music program to St. Cecilia, patroness of musicians, was performed on November 21. Vocalists included Mrs. Joe Ransdell, F. X. Ransdell, Miss McFarland, Miss L. McCulloch, and Mr. Martin. The amateurs presented Down by the Sea on November 29 for the ladies of the Episcopal Rectory. Hal Benham and Sam Kennedy, "whose inimitable acting was worthy of professionals," were the only individuals mentioned in the review. The sponsors received "about one hundred dollars" from the performance.¹⁰ During the following February the Catholic Church conducted a fair at Cohn's Opera House, the final amateur program given in the opera house, which was converted into an office building in June. The farce on the program included a cast of Mrs. J. E. Ransdell, Mary Turner, F. X. Ransdell, J. L. Martin, and John Rodge. Admission to the house was 15 cents; children 10 cents. Supper, 50 cents, lunch and coffee, 15 cents. And the "unique side shows" afforded assorted amusements. Receipts were "over three hundred dollars."¹¹

Of the children's theater groups during the period of Cohn's Opera House in Lake Providence little can be recorded with certainty.

⁸ Ibid., February 19, 1887.

⁹ Ibid., September 3, 1887.

¹⁰ Ibid., December 3, 1887.

¹¹ Ibid., February 4-11, 1888.

At least two attempts were made to organize juvenile dramatic clubs, and it is assumed that the productions were of a greater number than were reported in the weekly.

On July 12, 1883, the children of Lake Providence gave the earliest of their programs at Cohn's Opera House of which there is record. Simon Cohn gave free use of the theater for the program, according to the brief report in the local weekly, but the editor commented on the apparent lack of interest on the part of adults in the community.

The children's entertainment on Thursday evening was quite pleasant and enjoyable; all the little folks seemed to have a real jolly good time. We were astonished that so few of the grown people of the town were present to give their patronage and encouragement. There is nothing which adds so much to the happiness of our little fellows as to have the grown folks partake of and aid in their pleasures and they should always show their appreciation of this fact whenever an opportunity affords. . . .¹²

The type of program was not revealed in the editor's comments. The group probably included a number of individuals who joined in the organization of the Juvenile Dramatic Club under the leadership of Master Sam Kennedy in August, 1884.

Plans for the initial performance of the new club were announced for August 25 at the opera house. The Kennedy brothers, the leaders of the children's group, appeared frequently on the programs of the Ivanhoe Club. Of their work in the May, 1883, performance, the Democrat editor wrote:

The acting of Masters Sam and Joe Kennedy, of the dialogue, RHODERICK DHU AND FITZ JAMES, was magnificent. These young gentlemen show splendid promise of becoming fine orators.¹³

¹² Ibid., July 14, 1883.

¹³ Ibid., May 5, 1883.

Another citizen, describing the same scene in a later issue, said,

. . .As we witnessed the conflict between these young actors we felt ourselves transported to Scotland's wilds, where from some highland top we viewed in breathless silence, this mortal combat between these bold chiefs. . . .¹⁴

On July 22, preceding by several days the organization of the Juvenile Dramatic Club, Sam Kennedy appeared as Curtis Chipman in the Ivanhoe Club production of Above the Clouds. The critic commented

. . .Curtis Chipman (Sam Kennedy) rather youthful for the part, but, oh, my! didn't he make the chips fly. Sam is a good actor, a quick, clear-headed realizer of the situation on the stage; and in a few years more will compare favorably with the best of them. . . .¹⁵

Not until December, 1886, was a complete program of one of the children's entertainments given for publication. After a song of Greeting the operetta Four and Twenty Blackbirds was performed. Then followed a Charade, Surprise Party; a song, Sailing; a dialogue, Dottie Dick and Dickey Dot; an operetta, Little Red Riding Hood; and the closing song, Good Night. The program was directed by Annie Delony. A large audience, among them "a good number of grown people," attended the performance. Named in the casts were many of those who became active in Lake Providence theater during the last decade of the century. Mary Montgomery, Zet Maguire, Jake Purdy, Charley Ikerd, Paul Gardham, Moreau Purdy, and Ella Rous performed in the operetta Four and Twenty Blackbirds. Ada Rous and Morgan Larche were the "venerable grown folks" in Dottie Dick and Dickey Dot. Lucy Cohn played Red Riding Hood, Pauline Larche was

¹⁴ Ibid., May 12, 1883.

¹⁵ Ibid., July 26, 1884.

Fairy Queen, and her subjects were Mamie Lahier, Maggie Snyder, Annie Belden, Mary Montgomery, Shirley Williams and Ida Gardham.¹⁶

Two other juvenile programs were produced during 1887. The Episcopal church sponsored the programs, the funds to be used in building a rectory. Annie DeLong directed the children in a variety of plays and operettas including The Seven Old Ladies in Lavender Town, The Land of Nod, a tableau of the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins, and a silhouette pantomime of These Are the Races We Never Forget.¹⁷

During the summer of 1888 the opera house was converted to an office building. The June 30 issue of the Carroll Democrat reported:

Cohn's opera house is being changed into comfortable offices, and the four compartments are already engaged. Law, Medicine, and Insurance will reign, where sweet melodies prevailed and "tripping the light fantastic toe" was much enjoyed. Simon is determined to keep abreast of the times.

The local editor began in the same issue of the weekly an editorial campaign for a town hall, ". . . a building of sufficient dimensions to meet all the requirements of our community. . . ." Seven years passed, however, before the Lake Providence Opera House was completed in 1895.¹⁸

In the meantime local amateurs presented their entertainments in various storehouses adapted as temporary theaters. During the seven-year period community theatrical activity was limited to occasional benefit programs sponsored by the various church groups of the town.

¹⁶ Ibid., January 8, 1887.

¹⁷ Ibid., April 23, December 24-31, 1887.

¹⁸ The Banner-Democrat, May 25, 1895.

The Young Ladies Guild of the Episcopal equipped Dunn's store on Levee Street for their program on June 5, 1889. Tableaux, the Fan Brigade, and vocal and instrumental music made up the variety entertainment. Admission was fifty cents. On June 4 and 5, 1890, the same organization sponsored performances of A Dress Rehearsal. In September, however, Russell Burney rented the building and opened his general merchandise store, and Dunn's "Opera House" was no longer available to the amateurs.¹⁹

The Methodist church sponsored a benefit production of Among the Breakers at DiRago's store on August 8, 1889. J. M. Kennedy directed the play. May Howard Brock, Dessie Bell, Maud Taylor, and Ollie Keller received comments for their acting. The group organized the Lake Providence Dramatic and Public Hall Club during the following week, proposing to initiate a fund-raising campaign for the new public hall and theater. J. M. Kennedy was elected president, Maud Taylor, vice president, J. S. Guenard, stage manager, W. S. Brown, secretary, and Joe Kennedy, business manager.²⁰ Although the group was successful in effecting its organization under the leadership of veteran amateurs of the earlier Ivanhoe Dramatic Club, their productions, if any were put before the public, did not merit the notice of the town's two weeklies.

DiRago's store was not mentioned again in connection with community entertainments. On November 19 the Catholic Ladies, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Jos. E. Ransdell, presented a musical program at the McGuire Opera House. McGuire's was possibly the same vacant

¹⁹ Carroll Democrat, September 20, 1890.

²⁰ Carroll Banner, August 24, 1889.

store; however, a definite identification was not made. The managers of the concert gained the local editor's commendation for displaying "a gratifying amount of decorative talent in properly preparing McGuire's Opera House for the occasion, and at the same time left nothing undone in the way of comfort and convenience for the large number of people. . . ."22 The fact that the program was repeated a week later--even a third time on the following night for the benefit of an indigent family--to "large and appreciative" audiences indicated that the capacity of the hall was not great.

Two other dramatic programs were presented at McGuire's opera house. Grace Church Rectory Society produced The Mariner's Return and For Sweet Charity's Sake on February 12, 1890; and the Catholic Church sponsored a variety program which included the farce A Dead Shot on the evenings of June 11 and 12. There were new names among the performers in these plays. Harry Buckner and George Benham, Marie McFarland, Emma Guenard, Annie Deloney, and Miss Williams in the February production were the leading actors. Annie Blackman, Ida Noland, Mary Brock, Dr. F. E. Artaud, and J. M. Shelton were new, appearing with Guenard, McFarland, and Mrs. Ransdell of former casts.²³

During 1891 an elaborately planned May Day Festival and a Grand Tournament and Ball constituted the theatrical fare of Lake Providence. An outdoor stage was constructed at Arlington Grounds where the May Day coronation ceremonies took place. Public School

²² Carroll Democrat, November 23, 1889.

²³ Carroll Banner, February 15, June 14, 1890.

students determined by election the members of royalty and their proper attendants. W. Suzett Maguire and Maud Hamilton represented the May Day King and Queen. The Lords and Ladies of Honor were acted by Ella Lanier, Emma Bell, Etta Goodwin, Carrie Hall, John Kennedy, Charles Beard, Frank Pittman, and Albert Brock. Preceding the coronation the participants together with the members of the Lake Providence Fire Company and leading citizens of the town paraded through the principal streets to the music of the Lake Providence Silver Cornet Band. F. X. Ransdell, president of the Fire company, was orator of the day.²⁴

The V. M. Purdy Warehouse was "fitted up" for the Grand Tournament Coronation and Ball on June 2. "Knights" competed in the lists in the afternoon for the prize and privilege of selecting and crowning the queen of the ball in the evening. On this occasion twelve knights entered the contest. J. M. Kennedy, J. E. Ransdell, and Judge F. F. Montgomery were the judges. Mike Irvin of Madison Parish was Herald and J. W. Dunn was Grand Marshall of the day. Admission to the banquet, coronation ceremony, and the ball at Purdy's Warehouse was one dollar.²⁶

O'Sullivan's Store was the scene of the only dramatic production recorded in 1892. The children of the Grace Church Sunday School appeared in Tom Thumb's Wedding and were followed by an adult cast in the farce, Leap Year in the Village. The program was for the benefit

²⁴ Carroll Democrat and Carroll Banner, May 9, 1891.

²⁶ Carroll Banner, June 6, 1891.

of the Sunday school. Mrs. Goldenburg directed the plays. The farce was produced in Mayersville, Mississippi, on December 28, as the after-piece of the regular feature of the Mayersville Amateurs.²⁷

Since each new production demanded of the participants the equipping of a new stage in whatever building could be secured for a theater, the citizens of Lake Providence turned to a Literary Club for intellectual recreation during 1893-1894. A single reference is made by the Banner-Democrat to "the theatrical entertainment in town on Monday evening" April 24.²⁸ Whether the program was locally sponsored is uncertain. In January, 1894, the Wise and Otherwise Literary Club adopted its governing regulations and elected its first permanent officers: Judge J. M. Kennedy, president; Lucile McCulloch, 1st vice-president; Clifton F. Davis, second vice-president; J. D. Tompkins, secretary; Morgan Hamilton, treasurer. The club proposed to hold weekly meetings "at the residences designated by the President where readings, recitations, debates and musical contributions will form the programme for the evening."²⁹ The Iris Club, a similar organization under the leadership of J. E. Ransdell, preceded the Wise and Otherwise group. This first literary club disbanded after a few months because of "1st, the lack of interest on the part of the members to bring in their regular contribution; 2nd, a movement to make it a dancing club. . . ."³⁰ The current club showed great energy during

²⁷ Banner-Democrat, December 31, 1892.

²⁸ Ibid., April 29, 1893.

²⁹ Ibid., February 3, 1894.

³⁰ Ibid., January 20, 1894.

the spring months and was no doubt influential in motivating the competitive speaking exercises conducted by the public school on May 11. J. E. Ransdell, L. K. Barber, and C. S. Wyly formed the board of judges for the competition in which "eight or nine of the older scholars" contested for a silver medal.³¹

Members of the East Carroll Guards converted "the large brick store on Levee Street" into a temporary theater and ball room in April, 1894. The shelving was removed, the floor was leveled for dancing, the long counters were arranged in the rear of the building for use as supper tables. The building afforded a main hall seventy feet long and thirty-five feet wide, and two large rooms in the rear were converted into dressing rooms.³² The young men of the military company enlisted the assistance of the "young ladies of the Episcopal Church" to prepare dramatic programs for May 14 and 15. The first evening program consisted of a Scarf Drill by seven young ladies, an Exhibition drill by four members of the military company, vocal and instrumental music by Jomay and Ethel Egelly and Kittie McCulloch, and Miles Medic's two-act comedy, The Cool Collegians. On the following evening the Scarf Drill and Edwin M. Stern's two-act comedy-drama Hick'ry Farm were presented. Admission price was fifty cents for adults, twenty-five for children. Reserved seats were fifteen cents extra. On both evenings the "spacious Armory Hall was filled with large and appreciative audiences. . . ." J. M. Kennedy, Jr., S. B. Kennedy,

³¹ Ibid., May 19, 1894.

³² Ibid., April 21, 1894.

and Mary Montgomery gave especially effective performances.³³

This group of enthusiastic amateurs presented the Scarf Drill and Hick'ry Farm successfully at Mayersville, Mississippi, on May 30, and a renewal of energetic theatrical activity comparable to the days of Cohn's Opera House seemed assured for Lake Providence. In September Mr. White moved his business to the Armory Building, and the military company had to seek new quarters. Then began the move which eventually resulted in the building of the Lake Providence Opera House.³⁴

After the Cohn Opera House was turned into an office building in 1888, successive attempts were made to provide funds for building a public hall in Lake Providence. First among the moves was that of Fire Company No. 1. The group proposed a forty by twenty-five foot addition to their building, estimated to cost \$1500. When the project should be completed, the Carroll Democrat reported on October 8, 1888, the town would boast of a "splendid hall suitable for a ball room, concert hall, speakings and for all public purposes." Committees of the company were unable to secure by subscription sufficient funds for the project. The Lake Providence Dramatic and Public Hall Company, organized in August, 1889, purposed to contribute by giving a series of theatrical performances. They had no hall adequate for staging their plays. In January, 1890, the Banner proposed in its editorial columns the formation of a stock company for the issuance of shares "at five dollars each. Raise at least fifteen hundred dollars in this way, and then get a building and loan association to erect the hall, mortgaging

³³ Ibid., May 19, 1894.

³⁴ Ibid., September 8, 1894.

it to them for the remainder of the cost." Almost three years later-- December 17, 1892--the local weekly reported progress: "a strong move is being made to organize a joint stock company for the purpose of building a public hall on Lake street." Four thousand dollars was reported subscribed. A week later enthusiasm was spreading. Editorially, the citizens were informed that those in charge were making arrangements for "architectural plans" for a three-story building with a fifty foot frontage and a depth of eighty to ninety feet to be erected at the corner of Lake and Scarbrough streets.

It is intended to have two stores in the lower story each 25 feet wide. The second story will be arranged for opera, theatrical performances, dancing and social gatherings, with rooms in the rear for general convenience. The third story will be arranged carefully for the secret societies in town. . . .³⁵

The East Carroll Opera House and Building Association Limited was organized in January, 1893, its charter declaring the objects and purposes for which the corporation was established "to be primarily to build a Town Hall and Opera House in the town of Providence. . . ."³⁶ During the next two years the association operated simply as the Lake Providence Building Association. Nothing was done toward building the town hall, until the East Carroll Guards, finding themselves without an armory in September, 1894, undertook to finance by subscription the building a "hall to be used both as an armory and a town hall."³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., December 24, 1892.

³⁶ Charter of the East Carroll Opera House and Building Association, Limited. Article II, as published in the Lake Providence Carroll-Democrat, February 4, 1893.

³⁷ Banner-Democrat, December 15, 1894.

The opera house was built during the first months of 1895. J. S. Guenard became the regular manager and directed a group of Lake Providence young people in a production of The Charity Ball for the grand opening on May 23, 1895. The files of the Banner-Democrat are broken between December, 1894, and May 25, 1895. How nearly the opera house corresponded to descriptions of earlier proposals can only be conjectured. The seating capacity was probably about two hundred. Receipts for the opening performance amounted to only \$140. Another dramatic program in August grossed \$105.

The record of performances does not reflect a great enthusiasm for non-professional theater during the last years of the century in Lake Providence. There were five programs during 1895; four in 1896, all having taken place after July 1; there were four in 1897. Among these were the annual school program and occasional lecturers. In September, 1896, the local editor suggested to the opera house manager that he "should try to get some attractions to come to Providence" during the winter.³⁸ By January of the following year the amateurs were reported to be quietly preparing a drama "for the purpose of liquidating part of the indebtedness on the Opera House."³⁹

Manager Guenard secured an excellent cast of experienced amateurs for The Charity Ball: Sam Kennedy and Mary Montgomery, C. F. Davis, Carrie Hall, Annie and Ella Rous, Katie Turner, T. S. Delony, Suzett Maguire, Brock, Deeson, and Master Otto Hall. On June 7 the Graded

³⁸ Ibid., September 12, 1896.

³⁹ Ibid., January 30, 1897.

School gave their closing program of recitations, dialogues, and tableaux. John Lavins gave his Stereopticon Lectures on three nights, June 11, 12, and 13. Admission to the three lectures was fifty cents. A single lecture was 25 cents. Admission to the "Gallery" was only 40 cents for the three nights; fifteen cents for one lecture.⁴⁰

On August 7 the Amateur Dramatic Company of Omega, a small Madison Parish community about 20 miles south of Lake Providence, presented Under the Laurels at the Opera House. The house was "taxed to its utmost capacity" and the manager reported receipts of \$105. Mrs. Taylor directed a group of young people in a series of "stereopticon views and living pictures" on November 28. The program was for the benefit of the Episcopal Church. In August, 1896, the Lake Providence amateurs produced George Melville Baker's Comrades as a benefit for Mary Turner, one of the amateurs, "to enable her to finish her art studies at Belhaven."⁴¹ Established players appeared in the cast: Ella Rous, Carrie Hall, Susie Taylor, Sam and John Kennedy, Fred Schneider, and Moreau Purdy gave their time and talents for the young artist's benefit. Among the Breakers was the Christmas Night program at the Opera House. The same cast which presented the play at Dirago's Store on August 15, 1889, appeared in this 1896 production. The Banner-Democrat commented that the talent was "above the average" and that the acting "compared favorably with professionals."

The few scattered paragraphs which appeared on infrequent occasions in the weekly during the next three years indicated little

⁴⁰ Ibid., June 1, 1895.

⁴¹ Ibid., August 29, September 12, 1896.

theatrical activity. The Negroes of the Methodist Church gave a concert and tableaux program on January 4, 1897. The entertainment was given at the church and tickets were twenty-five cents. The amateurs produced Betsy Baker at the Opera House on August 5 for funds to finance the Military Company encampment at Shreveport.⁴² In 1899 the young people turned to impromptu balls for their recreation. Luther Manship of Jackson, Mississippi, was engaged for a series of "lectures" in November. He was described as "a fine caricaturist" whose splendid impersonations "excelled especially in the Negro and Irish dialects."⁴³ After 1895 non-professional theater gradually gave way to the increasingly numerous professional troupes engaged for performances at the opera house. During these years the Lake Providence amateurs lacked leadership comparable to that of J. M. Kennedy, Joe E. Ransdell, and J. S. Guenard during the 1880's—an additional cause for their inactivity.

Monroe

After the Gerspach Hall was equipped as a theater in 1877, the manager was successful in booking engagements by companies traveling between Vicksburg and Shreveport. Thus Monroe had a great amount of theater during the winter months, comparatively little of which resulted from creative effort of the people. From 1880 to 1890, the latest period of the nineteenth century of which the papers are preserved, there occurred two or three non-professional productions each year. There were at different times during the decade three producing groups:

⁴² Ibid., July 31, August 7, 1897.

⁴³ Ibid., November 11, 1899.

the dramatic club, a group of musically trained individuals who preferred musical drama, and St. Hyacinth's Academy.

The Monroe Dramatic Society produced The Limerick Boy on April 29, 1880, for benefit of the Irish Relief Fund. On the same evening the ladies of the Methodist Church served a supper at the Monroe House, "delightful refreshments" for those "attending the performance of the Amateur Dramatic Club" for fifty cents. Receipts reported for the Methodist Ladies benefit were between \$95 and \$100; The Irish Relief Fund received \$25 "net proceeds" from the dramatic performance.⁴⁴ The dramatic club from Trenton, a community across the river from Monroe, gave a performance in Monroe on December 2, 1881. The company was directed by Julius Ellinger, and the entertainment was given for the benefit of the Monroe Masonic Lodge.⁴⁵

Mrs. L. W. Surghnor directed a cantata which was produced at the opera house for the benefit of the Masonic Fraternity on December 23. Though the Telegraph reported that the "expenses absorbed the receipts," the cantata was highly complimented as an artistic production. With it began the leisurely series of musical productions during the next few years in Monroe.

Grace Church sponsored a variety program on September 27, 1882; a series of tableaux based upon the usual colonial historic events and a few familiar biblical scenes. Lou Slaughter and Lou Ray provided music; however,

⁴⁴ Monroe Bulletin, April 28, May 5, 1880.

⁴⁵ Quachita Telegraph, December 2, 1881.

The great feature. . . of the evening was the first appearance and drill of the Ouachita Broom Guards. These lady soldiers first presented themselves in a Tableau as at rest in their camp with one of their number on guard armed with the broom, and the scene finally closing by the entire company's singing in admirable time the old war song of "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground." . . . To say that these young ladies are as nearly perfect as possible in the drill of marching, of facing, and of the manual of arms would be to give but a slight idea of the admirable soldierly appearance they made under the skillful teaching of their director and commander Mr. Cohn. . . .⁴⁶

On November 7 and 9 Monroe singers gave performances of the oratorio Esther, the Beautiful Queen. Jessie Benton sang the Esther role. Other players were J. D. Oakley, Dr. Demmler, Embling and Dinkgrave, Miss Hebler, and Miss Neuhauser. The production was directed by a Monroe minister, Rev. Dr. Levy.⁴⁷

The Midnight Watch, a cantata, and The Secret composed the entertainment of Monroe amateurs on April 12, 1883. According to the Bulletin of April 18, the performance was highly creditable, though the audience was small. There was a visit to Monroe by the Shreveport Amateur Company in March, 1886. Gilbert and Sullivan's Patience was the operetta in which were featured thirty voices. Monroe young people employed the string band from Vicksburg to play for a special ball following the performance.⁴⁸ Monroe organized its own amateur opera company in January, 1887. Thirty-two members made up the group and their first production was the operetta The Little Tycoon on May 4. F. W.

⁴⁶ Ibid., September 30, 1882.

⁴⁷ Bulletin, November 15, 1882.

⁴⁸ Ouachita Telegraph, March 21, 28, 1886.

Blees, a Monroe music teacher, was director; Ida C. Hawley, stage manager; and Henry Kaliski and J. Kern were scenic artists. On May 6 the troupe gave a performance in Shreveport. Mrs. Alice Meyer and J. D. Oakley were the featured singers in the cast.⁴⁹

Notices of four other home-sponsored dramatic performances in Monroe were recorded in the weekly. In September the Young Catholic Friends' Society gave a program at their hall which consisted of vocal music and the comic drama All That Glitters Is Not Gold. Ira McCormick, Alex Benoit, Marion McGuire, Frank and Henry Moore, Lou Bres, Annie Bradley, and T. B. Stewart were participants.⁵⁰ The three plays remaining to be identified were commencement performances given by the Hyacinth's Academy. The school fitted the hall of the Young Catholic Friends' Society with special stage scenery and arranged the elevated seats for the audience. The local editor described the production of the three-act play The Waif of the Woods as one of the better productions by amateurs presented in Monroe. The school presented The Champion of Her Sex as the commencement feature on June 28, 1888. The next annual production presented the farce The Matrimonial Advertisement and the drama Miriam.⁵¹ This last program was held at Garretson's Opera House, probably the same hall known earlier as Gerspach's. There were one hundred reserved seats at seventy-five cents. General admission was fifty cents. St. Hyacinth's annual programs were well planned and thoroughly rehearsed and gave a satisfaction which gained for the school

⁴⁹ Ibid., May 7, 1887.

⁵⁰ Ibid., September 10, 1887.

⁵¹ Ibid., July 2, 1887; June 30, 1888; June 22, 1889.

a valued regard among the citizens of Monroe.

On July 23, 1894, fire which started in the scenery of the stage destroyed Garretson's Opera House and adjoining buildings occupied by business establishments of Dr. Aby, L. Patagna, Dr. A. B. Sholars, G. C. Moore, and J. M. Goss.

The opera house and the two stores underneath it and the store to the west adjoining belonged to Col. Jno. B. Garretson. There was \$11,500 insurance on these buildings and the opera house furniture, and if this amount is collected his loss will not be great. . . . Very likely all talk of a new, modern hotel and a new, modern opera house will not have a result until the insurance money is paid. But such talk does no harm. Everything that has been done in Monroe lately has been well done; and has been done in time. And so Monroe will have an opera house and a hotel, and they will be modern and well constructed. . . .⁵²

Professional companies played engagements in Monroe as they made their winter circuits. Huntley-Kennedy Dramatic Company, Katie Putnam Comedy Company, Florence J. Bindley Company, The Alpine Choir, Louise Balfe, George C. Miln, with Adele Payn and Wm. W. Griffith, were among the troupes whose productions received favorable audiences in Monroe. These and others probably continued to visit Monroe until the 1894 fire destroyed the playhouse. Doubtless Monroe's lively professional theater was an important reason for lack of non-professional activity.

Miscellaneous Communities

Fragmentary information indicates extensive theatrical activity among the smaller communities of Northeast Louisiana during the closing

⁵² Monroe Bulletin, July 28, 1894.

decades of the nineteenth century. Some of the towns had organized groups; others evidently carried on a lively amount of community entertainment through voluntary participation by many of the people in church and school sponsored programs. Too little is known of these groups who occasionally inserted notices in the weeklies of the larger towns to attract larger audiences to their performances.

In 1887, Farmerville, in Union parish, had a local theater called Stein's Hall; and on June 14 the Methodist church sponsored a theatrical performance including The Seven Clerks with the farce Snap-ping Turtles as afterpiece. R. G. Pleasant, later governor of Louisiana, was a member of the acting corps. Others in the benefit plays included S. B. Wallace, J. A. Rabun, W. J. Turnage, J. R. Simmons, H. A. McFarland, W. L. Trimble, B. B. Heller, E. Stern, Mrs. C. H. Jameson, and Miss L. Guehring.⁵³ Minstrel troupes were active in Rayville, Richland parish, and Tallulah, Madison parish, during the 1880's. The Rayville company gave a performance at the Monroe Opera House on April 21, 1881, and ". . . acquitted themselves very well, considering that they are not only young in age, but also in experience."⁵⁴ During May, 1889, the Tallulah minstrel troupe performed on successive Thursday evenings. The effectiveness of their variety entertainments led the editor of the Madison Journal to suggest that ". . . the Minstrels take up the role of amateur theatricals. . . ."⁵⁵

⁵³ (Monroe) Ouachita Telegraph, June 11, 1887.

⁵⁴ Ibid., April 22, 1881.

⁵⁵ Madison Journal, May 18, 1889.

Probably the most active of the smaller community theater groups during the early part of the period was the Trenton Dramatic Club. Trenton was an important commercial port on the Ouachita River about two miles northwest from Monroe as long as steamboat was the principal means of transportation in that section of the state. The earliest notice of its amateur theater group was a review in the Monroe weekly of performances of Trial by Jury and Handy Andy on the evenings of March 27 and 28, 1879. The plays were presented in Murphy's Storehouse, "which was comfortably fitted up." Mrs. Miles directed the entertainment, and her costuming of the operetta gained particular commendation. D. M. Sholars, J. H. Steel, Charles Allen, Lula Drago, and Lena Morris gave good performances in the operetta; Ned McGuire as Handy Andy in the farce displayed an astute appreciation of Irish character and humor.⁵⁶ The group presented the operetta Penelope "at the Academy," on March 18, 1881, but by September of that year the amateurs had equipped a new hall. The Mistletoe Bough and the farce My Father's Will were scheduled for performance at their hall on September 17 and 18, the funds to be divided among the various Sabbath schools of Trenton.⁵⁷ The Dramatic Club accepted an invitation to give a benefit performance in Monroe for the Masonic Fraternity on December 2. Julius Ellinger served as stage manager for the program. The club scheduled The Branch of Promise and In the Wrong House, or No. 6 Duke Street for performances during Christmas week.⁵⁸ The first play was repeated in February, and

⁵⁶ Ibid., April 4, 1879.

⁵⁷ Ibid., September 11, 1881.

⁵⁸ Ibid., December 2, 1881.

the program afterpiece was The Loan of a Lover.⁵⁹ Of amateur activities in Trenton nothing further appeared in the Monroe weeklies. The group probably continued its performances only a short time after 1882. During the next five years the small river port lost all importance in the commerce of Northeast Louisiana, and her citizens moved to more prosperous locations. According to the Monroe weekly,

. . . After the extension of the V(icksburg), S(hreveport) & P(acific), and the consequent dissolution of the once famous commercial town of Trenton, the now equally famous town of West Monroe came into existence. Many of the old merchants of Trenton followed "the star of empire" westward, settled on the V., S. & P., and founded the growing town of Ruston. Other [sic], among them Millsaps Bros., Flourney & Co., Jethro Moore and W. E. Morris, moved down to what was then known as Cotton Port. There they joined the pioneer of West Monroe Merchants, E. Wheatley, the Ross Grocer, and McGuire & Grosley. . . .⁶⁰

Notwithstanding the fact that the Lake Providence Ivanhoe Dramatic Club was one of the outstanding non-professional theater organizations in the state during the 1880's, community theater in northeast Louisiana did not achieve an importance comparable to that of similar groups in other sections of the state. Amateur theatrical performances were on the whole infrequent. Although many of the entertainments permitted large numbers of people to participate, groups seldom became sufficiently interested to form regular theatrical clubs. On the other hand, church and school groups in many smaller communities sponsored benefit entertainments which provided theater to more remote

⁵⁹ Monroe Bulletin, February 15, 1882.

⁶⁰ Ouachita Telegraph, November 5, 1887.

settlements throughout the area.

In Lake Providence the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club (1883-1886) and the Juvenile Dramatic Club (1884-1886); The Monroe Dramatic Society (1880-1881), and the Monroe Opera Company (1887); and the Trenton Dramatic Club, (1879-1882) achieved varying degrees of success in providing worthwhile amusement for their members and in contributing funds to community projects. The Ivanhoe Dramatic Club, under the direction of J. M. Kennedy, developed a numerous corps of amateur actors, among whom were J. S. Guenard, a capable director of amateur theatrical productions a decade later, and Joseph E. Ransdell, the eminent United States senator from Louisiana between 1913-1931. This theater group considered as its dominant objective that of providing for the development and amusement of its members. Its programming, consequently, followed no particular practice. The club gave full evening plays, programs of one-act plays, and variety entertainments consisting of tableaux, dramatic readings, and vocal and instrumental music. Allied with the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club was the Lake Providence Juvenile Dramatic Club under the direction of Sam and Joe Kennedy, sons of the adult group's director, and Annie Delony. Many of the amateurs continued active in community theatrical activities after 1888, when Cohn's Opera House was converted into an office building, bringing to an end the organized program of the Ivanhoe Club. Until the new Opera House was completed in 1895, local church and civic groups sponsored a variety of entertainments, presenting their programs in storehouse theaters.

During this period of no regular playhouse in Lake Providence J. M. Kennedy, then a member of the Louisiana state judiciary, organized and directed the activities of the Wise and Otherwise Literary Club.

The group conducted weekly meetings at the various residences of its members, the programs consisting of readings, recitations, debates, and musical performances. In 1891 the community held a grand tournament in imitation of the pageantry and chivalry of the medieval lists. After the military unit of East Carroll Parish built the new Opera House in 1895, Lake Providence theater patrons depended more upon touring theater companies, as the people of Monroe continued to do after the opening of Gerspach's Opera House in 1876.

Summary

Amateur theater in Louisiana reached its highest point of development during the decade of the 1880's. In certain individual communities the most flourishing period of non-professional theatrical activity came earlier. Alexandria and Monroe declined sharply during the preceding decade. St. Francisville reached its peak of productivity about 1880, and New Iberia by 1883.

Over the state generally, however, the amateur theater continued its flourishing activity and greatly improved the quality of its programming, acting, directing, and all technical aspects of production. After the close of the Reconstruction period, organized theater groups no longer felt an obligation to provide entertainment for their respective communities. They formed and maintained dramatic clubs simply to provide for the amusement and mutual improvement of the members. Frequently they performed for the financial benefit of local civic and religious organizations, thus achieving a second purpose of contributing to the general community welfare. Organizations consistently vested administrative authority in the president, the secretary-

treasurer, and the stage manager. Few dramatic clubs restricted their memberships. The Sans Souci Dramatic Club (c.1881-1884) in St. Francisville, the Covington Dramatic Club (1887-1888), and both the Evergreen Dramatic Club (1882-1883) and The Men of Mirth (1892-1894) in Thibodaux included only young men, who, however, invited young women of their communities to participate in their public programs. More numerous and prosperous were the community-wide theater organizations whose acting corps consisted of large numbers of young and old residents interested in participating in the various phases of theatrical entertainments. Striking examples of this type of amateur theatrical organization were the Helping Hands Dramatic Association (1887-1888) in St. Francisville; the Alexandria Amateur Dramatic Club (1893-1897); The Progressive Dramatic Association (1883-1885) of Plaquemine; the Painscourtville (1885-1893), Napoleonville (1880-1893), and Breau Bridge (1886-1893) dramatic clubs; the Opelousas Social Club (1885-1894), Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association (1888-1895), and the Joseph Jefferson Dramatic Club (1894-1896); the Ivanhoe Dramatic Club (1883-1886) in Lake Providence; and many, many others. Theatrical activity was by no means restricted to organized theater clubs. Volunteer fire companies, bands, fraternal organizations, and church and school groups used the talents of local amateurs freely in producing benefit dramatic programs.

A number of distinct characteristics of non-professional theater activity during the closing decades of the nineteenth century mark it as being generally superior, in many respects, to that of the Reconstruction period. Theaters were larger, more conveniently arranged, and better equipped. Although many community theater groups continued

to perform in converted storehouse theaters, volunteer fire companies built adequate theaters in at least nine towns. The Knights of Pythias in St. Francisville, the East Carroll parish military company in Lake Providence, and the city government of Covington built theaters in those communities. After 1880 amateurs in a number of towns had the use of privately owned and managed theaters.

Moreover, the period extending roughly from 1880 to 1895 was one of many efficient stage managers. The more talented amateurs of the previous period developed into mature directors and more experienced actors. Among the directors who were more outstanding in their respective communities were Judge J. M. Kennedy, Lake Providence; Judge Felix Voorhies, St. Martinville; Dr. E. T. Dugas, Napoleonville and Paincourtville; Gus L. Friend, Wash Hands, and Sam Dreyfus, St. Francisville; W. F. Evans, Covington; Ludwig A. Geissler, Liberty; J. P. Terregano, Alexandria; J. C. Moise, Natchitoches; W. L. Shackelford, Colfax; I. D. Moore, Joseph A. and Louis J. Trone, Thibodaux; Paul Lebarve, T. B. Ellison, T. E. Grace, George A. Coulon, and Charles Dupuy, Plaquemine; Henry Vander Cruyssen, Breaux Bridge and Lafayette; Rudolph Mayer, Charles P. White, Charles Crant Shaffer, and Thomas P. Bowden, Opelousas; and L. C. Moise, Houma. Equally well known as directors in their communities were Mrs. Lucille LeBlanc, Mrs. George W. Jones, and Mrs. Lizzie C. Sims in Napoleonville; Tennie Robertson and Ella Bryan, Plaquemine; Mrs. N. H. Thompson, Natchitoches; Rena Phillips, Cheneyville; Mrs. J. D. Austen, St. Francisville; and Mrs. O. V. Richard in Covington.

The technical aspects of theatrical production gained greater

emphasis. Plays more often demanded special scenery, stage effects, and particular costuming. Even though the standard scenery for exterior, interior, court, and cottage scenes together with drop curtains were among the equipment in most of the theaters, local directors frequently provided scenery for particular plays. Rudolph Mayer and Charles Grant Shaffer in Opelousas and T. B. Ellison in Plaquemine executed sets for the operettas that they directed. Henry Vander Cruyssen of Breaux Bridge, Dr. E. T. Dugas of Napoleonville, Joseph A. Trone of Thibodaux, and George A. Coulon of Plaquemine were among other directors who also painted new scenery for their plays. Amateurs who were related with the theaters only as scenic artists included Jack Goulden of Alexandria, William Wilson, Plaquemine, Charles Gray, Napoleonville, C. E. Addison, Thibodaux, and Miss M. E. Scott, Morrow.

Theater groups throughout the state followed a gradual change from the long play-afterpiece theater program during the 1880 decade. Pure stage fun provided by short farces and comedies during the Reconstruction period gradually gave way to more challenging plays, representative among them being Robertson's Home, Dreams, and Caste; Boucicault's London Assurance; Banlm's Damon and Pythias; Jefferson and Shewell's Shadows of a Great City. Frequently groups chose the more sentimental and melodramatic pieces as Clouds, Strife, Out in the Streets, Esmeralda, Border Land, and Hick'ry Farm; and the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, Planquette, and Willard Spenser were played by amateurs in Monroe, Opelousas, Plaquemine, and Thibodaux. Only on variety programs of readings, tableaux, and music did the one-act farce continue to hold an important place in the repertoires of community theatrical clubs. In three Louisiana communities amateur playwrights

contributed to the general prestige of their organizations. Judge Felix Voorhies of St. Martinville wrote a variety of comedies, farces, and dramatic readings portraying the life of the French people of the Bayou Country. L. C. Moise, a Houma attorney, wrote and produced two full length plays: Curiosity (1894), a four-act comedy, and Oliver Cromwell (1899), a biographical play. Ludwig A. Geissler, founder and director of the Liberty Educational Club (1888-1891), wrote and produced at least eight one-act comedies and a four-act musical comedy. Rudolph Mayer established a reputation for great originality and ability through his adaptations and arrangements of musical plays for the Opelousas Philharmonic Association (1879-1882) and the Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association (1888-1895).

Two children's theaters gained prominence in their communities during the period. The Little Workers (1884-1885) in Plaquemine and the Juvenile Dramatic Club (1884-1886) in Lake Providence not only provided effective theatrical entertainment during the years of their activity, they also served to train younger actors who graduated to the adult theater groups in their communities. Little is known of the theatrical entertainment provided by Negro amateur theater organizations; however, the Negro residents in Opelousas, St. Francisville, St. Martinville, Thibodaux, and Donaldsonville had active dramatic clubs at various times during the period.

In addition to their purely dramatic organizations the people of Louisiana sponsored many other theatrical and quasi-theatrical group activities. Minstrel companies were numerous, the striking example being the Donaldsonville Amateur Minstrel Company (c.1887-1892). Organized "principally for their own amusement" and "to benefit worthy

local objects," the troupe frequently performed in neighboring Bayou Country towns. They built new routines around local institutions and individuals and invariably met with enthusiastic audience responses. The Plattenville Philharmonic Society Chorus and the Abbeville Glee Club gained community popularity with their intra-act performances on dramatic club programs. The Philharmonic, Literary and Dramatic Association and the Social Club of Opelousas conducted regular programs of music and literary events for their members. In Lake Providence the Iris Club, under the leadership of Joseph E. Ransdell, and the Wise and Otherwise Club, directed by J. M. Kennedy; and the Catholic Knights and the Parthenon Literary Societies of Thibodaux maintained effective programs for their members. Music organizations made important contributions to the overall effectiveness of the amateur theater throughout the period. Tournaments were held in Lake Providence and Opelousas. The Opelousas event, managed by Dr. Fred J. Mayer, included the dramatized Spanish Court reception of Columbus upon his return from his first voyage to America, exemplifying an original and successful attempt to adapt the revived medieval field exercise to portray specific historical events.

By 1895 most of the theaters in the larger communities in Louisiana were privately owned or were managed by private groups who operated them as commercial theaters. Regular professional theater circuits had been developing for almost two decades. During the period when professional theater was developing as a profitable business throughout the state, other phases of Louisiana's economy were developing into a more industrious and competitive system. The community-

wide interest in amateur theatrical activities which grew up through the Reconstruction period and reached its peak in the many flourishing theater organizations during the 1880's gradually gave way to the more vital business of earning a livelihood during the last decade of the century. This decline in state-wide interest together with the conveniently available professional theater reduced amateur activity in the towns of Louisiana to small groups of individuals who maintained their desire to produce plays and whose economic condition permitted them sufficient time for preparation of a few programs during the year.

SUMMARY

After 1803, settlers from the United States and from Europe swarmed into the developing sugar cane areas of south Louisiana and into the cotton and lumber producing areas of the Florida Parishes, along Red River, and up the Ouachita and Mississippi rivers into Northeast Louisiana. French villages, which for half a century had settled into the complacency of a provincial colonial empire, were invaded by great numbers of English speaking newcomers. Small towns sprang up in the Florida Parishes and along the Red River, and frontier settlements dotted the Ouachita and upper Mississippi. Here lived the people who developed the sugar and cotton plantations. Here lived the artisans--the tanners and mechanics, the merchants, the coopers and carriage makers. Here too were the professional people--the teachers, attorneys, the physicians and apothecaries--and that great group of workers whose business it was to keep the river commerce moving.

The first half of the nineteenth century was therefore a new period of settlement and growth for the state of Louisiana. A great number of related community group activities served to weld village populations into social units and to promote their cultural development. Churches and schools with their allied social activities were basic and continuous. The people founded library associations; then followed literary societies, lyceums, and debating clubs--organizations which promoted group and individual participation in public activities. Variety in performances and familiarity with performers contributed to audience interest. Of wider public appeal were patriotic holiday celebrations and public balls and parties. More theatrical and

more conducive to normal performer-audience relationships were the numerous recitals by short-term dancing and music school classes; amateur vocal and instrumental music concerts; tableaux and charade representations; and occasional minstrel company programs.

In three of the four areas of the state the people organized theater groups. The St. Francisville Theater Association, formed during the winter of 1810-1811, and the Alexandria Thespian Association, established in 1821, furnished regular theatrical entertainment at the time other community groups were organizing. The Franklin Histrionic Association (1850), the Clinton Shakespearean Society (1855), and the Thibodaux Societe Dramatique de Bienfaisance (1861) came later in the period after the more literary and quasi-theatrical activities had developed a spirit of co-operative effort among the people.

Considered independently, these organized amateur theater associations were relatively insignificant; taken as one of a number of means for social and cultural development and as a source of wholesome entertainment, they assume much greater importance in their respective communities. Their organizations functioned under adopted regulations which were administered by elected officers: president, secretary-treasurer, and stage manager, who directed the programs. Only young men were members of the St. Francisville and Alexandria theater associations; therefore, a few of their actors concentrated their abilities in portraying feminine roles regularly. The dominant objective of these groups was to provide worthwhile theatrical entertainment in their towns. St. Francisville and Clinton purposed further to develop the acting and music talents of their members, and the Thibodaux dramatic society wished to furnish funds to charity. They financed their organizations by subscription, by assessment, and by

admissions to performances. Their plays were the popular comedies and melodramas being played in the contemporary professional theater. Performances were given regularly about every two weeks during the period of their activity. Generally their programs consisted of a long play, an interlude of orchestral music or comic songs and dramatic readings, and an afterpiece. To accommodate its bilingual audience, the Thibodaux society planned programs of French and English one-act plays. Particularly important were contributions of music groups allied with the Clinton and Thibodaux amateur theater organizations. Their performances were presented in small theaters improvised in buildings already available. Although these pre-war theater groups recieved a liberal patronage at their performances, there was not a community-wide enthusiasm comparable to that which developed throughout the state following the Civil War.

Strolling actors and musicians, and itinerant lecturers provided a variety of programs in many of the towns during the early period. The local hotel ballroom was the theatre for them as it was the ballroom for soirees, dancing class recitals, and musical concerts for the towns-people. Not only did these professional performances serve to entertain the people for the moment, but they contributed materially to the development of greater audience appreciation for theatrical amusement and motivated interests conducive to a broader community participation.

From 1861 through 1865 there was no theater in Louisiana. When the war ended, however, Confederate veterans returned to their homes to make adjustments required by the military decisions and to rehabilitate community institutions which had deteriorated from inattention. Those who had participated in the village minstrel troupes,

the church-sponsored tableaux, and the amateur theater clubs before the war planned and produced community entertainments to raise funds for churches, for schools, and for families that had been more unfortunate victims of the war. Many people participated in these variety programs; even greater numbers attended them. Consequently, during the interval between 1866 and 1868 a universal interest in community theater developed in Louisiana.

In the theater the people found a satisfactory means of contributing toward rebuilding their communities. They found a relief from the tensions arising from present strenuous and uncertain economic and political conditions. As they developed adequate leadership, the people formed theater clubs, many of which were short lived, but all of which served to provide theatrical entertainment and to give experience in acting, management, and production.

Two distinct types of amateur theater organizations developed, differing chiefly in memberships and in the scope of their activities. The first type, similar to pre-war theater associations, was the young men's groups who gave frequent purely dramatic programs for the entertainment of the community and for their mutual amusement and cultural development. The Edwin Forrest Dramatic Club (1876-1880) in St. Francisville, The Thespian Association (1868-1870) in Alexandria, and the Young Men's Dramatic Club of Lafourche (1874-1877) in Thibodaux were the more successful. Although their memberships were restricted to young men, the Alexandria organization was the only one of these groups that did not invite the young women of the community to act in their plays. The second type of amateur theater organization which

developed during the Period of Reconstruction had a community-wide membership of young and old. Clubs of this class gave three or four major theater productions each year; however, their regular club activities included social meetings, literary and music branches which conducted frequent programs attended by members and others alike. There were flourishing organizations of this type in Donaldsonville, Plaquemine, St. Francisville, Abbeville, Grand Coteau, Monroe, and Opelousas.

The amateur theater clubs of the Reconstruction period were well organized, if sometimes poorly managed. They elected their officers annually or semi-annually, and frequently young people with little knowledge or experience began at the level of assistant stage manager and progressed through the positions of the organizational staffs. Theater group objectives were usually three: to provide community entertainment first, then to furnish financial aid to worthy causes, and finally to amuse and cultivate their members. They chose plays generally within their abilities to act and produce. Predominantly, their repertoires consisted of comedies and farces which had been and frequently still were popular in the professional theater. The melodramas and sentimental plays of George Melville Baker were frequently performed, particularly toward the close of the 1870's. In some of the amateur theaters, particularly in Alexandria, Plaquemine, and St. Francisville, the long play-interlude-afterpiece pattern of programming continued. Many other clubs preferred a program of short plays. Original stump speeches and comic songs satirized state and local Reconstruction government officials and corrupt political practices.

"Ethiopian farces" burlesqued the Negro in his new status as a free man. Extremely popular as interludes, these stage items had value only for the moment; nevertheless in them lay the Louisiana amateurs' original contribution to their theater.

Except for the public halls built by volunteer fire companies and Odd Fellows and Masonic fraternal organizations, Reconstruction theaters were the courtrooms in parish court houses, converted store-houses, or temporary outdoor pavilions erected for performances of specially sponsored programs. Theater capacities were small; playing spaces were inadequate. The same stage scenery often served for many performances. A few of the clubs collected wardrobes of costumes, wigs, and mistaches for stock characters. The editorial comments consistently supported the amateur clubs and their efforts. On the other hand, they seldom neglected to point out defects in management, in directing, in the acting, and in the general audience behavior. In the eyes of the local press the performers and the patrons were parts of one unit, separated merely by the footlights.

The period produced no native playwrights among the amateurs, only three original plays being recorded. Each of them was written by a different author, and the writers lived in different communities. There were, however, capable directors and actors who distinguished themselves in their various communities. Simon Richard of Opelousas--puppeteer, shadow pantomimist, magician, scenic artist, and director--made a state-wide reputation. The Claverie Brothers in Donaldsonville were talented actors, musicians, and directors. John H. Shanks in Plaquemine, Thomas A. Badeaux and Joseph A. Troné in Thibodaux, and Gus Brown in St. Francisville were capable and versatile in their

theater activities. John Goulden, the Alexandria commercial artist, was the most original scene designer outside New Orleans.

A variety of theatrical activity, quite apart from the purely dramatic performances, augmented the organized community entertainments during the post-war period. There were minstrel troupes who formed for brief periods. Tournaments which imitated the medieval lists provided pageantry and spectacle. Church fairs and firemen's fêtes champêtres extended for two or three days, furnishing amusements of great variety. Band organizations contributed both independently and as a part of the amateur theater.

Professional theater spread out to many Louisiana communities during the 1870's. W. H. Crisp, J. G. Stutz, The Baileys, Ida Lewis, and Helen D^kste headed reliable and efficient troupes. Engagements were infrequent and seldom extended beyond a week. Nevertheless, privately owned and managed theaters which catered to the commercial theater trade were established in Monroe and Alexandria before the close of the Reconstruction period.

Louisiana regained her political autonomy during the first gubernatorial administration of Francis T. Nicholls, which began in 1877. Economic adjustments evolved into more stable conditions. Social, civic, and religious institutions attained greater financial independence in their communities. Non-professional theater became a statewide institution as it spread out even among the smaller villages and rural communities during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

In the 1880's amateur theater in Louisiana reached its peak of artistic development. Theaters were greatly improved. Volunteer

firemen, Knights of Pythias, Opera House Associations, and private business men designed and built halls adequately adapted to community theatrical needs. Capable directors, both men and women, assumed a vigorous leadership. Experienced actors were numerous. Repertoires of new and challenging plays were prepared.

Theater organizations were generally community-wide and uniform in their administration. The club presidents and stage managers assumed greater importance. Groups financed their activities by admissions. Their general objectives shifted from that of providing community entertainment and financing local institutions to that of supplying a means for the social, cultural, and artistic growth of participating members. Programming practices gradually changed from the long play-afterpiece to the single full-evening play. In the meantime, the one-act play was relegated to a position on the variety program with music and tableaux. Although many plays from previous periods were performed, most amateur clubs chose the dramas and operettas from recent professional repertoires. Demands in production made by these plays promoted a balance of emphasis among costuming, scenery, stage effects, and acting and resulted in a degree of artistic excellence superior to that reached in the amateur theater at any previous time. In four communities amateur groups produced the plays of native playwrights. Judge Felix Voorhies in St. Martinville, Ludwig A. Geissler in Liberty, and L. C. Moise in Houma contributed plays for their respective theater groups. Rudolph Mayer, musician and director of the Opelousas Philharmonic Association, made numerous adaptations of musical dramas which his group produced successfully.

During the closing period the amateur theaters enjoyed a

liberal and encouraging patronage in their communities. Local editors were sympathetic but firm in their criticism. By 1895, however, the lively community interest in non-professional theater had begun a rapid decline. The conveniently available professional theater and the urgent necessity on the part of citizens to provide a livelihood in the strongly competitive economy diverted their interests and time from the amateur theater.

The touring system of the commercial theater began its slow development in Louisiana early in the 1870's. The Exchange Hotel theater in Alexandria and Gerspach's Opera House in Monroe were among the first privately managed theaters to cater to the commercial theater business. During the 1880's the New Iberia Opera House Association, Perrodin's Opera House in Opelousas, Freyhan's Opera House in St. Francisville, and others appeared. Midway the closing decade most of the theaters were privately managed, and professional theater grew in commercial importance. By the close of the century amateur theater activity had dwindled to the three or four productions produced each year in the various communities by small groups of individuals who were sufficiently independent economically to have time to cultivate their interests in theater.

For almost a century amateur theater provided wholesome and worthwhile amusement in the communities of Louisiana. It performed its greatest service to the people during the strenuously uncertain period of Reconstruction by supporting financially the rehabilitation of community institutions and by bolstering the general morale through its broad and wholesome diversions. It developed to a high degree of artistic excellence under the industrious leadership of its capable

directors, actors, musicians, and technicians during the 1880's. It contributed materially to the social and cultural growth of the people. In Louisiana the amateur theater of the nineteenth century was not, therefore, the "wily serpent," seeking ". . . to improve on the standards of the professionals of the stage. . . ." ¹ Rather it went out to St. Francisville, to Opelousas, and to Natchitoches, taking the drama to places where the professional theater could not go.

¹Odell, Annals of the New York Stage, I, p. 142.

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Alexandria

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November 28, December 5, 1829.

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1858; July 13, 1859 - April 25, 1860; September 10, 17, 1862;
January 6, August 4, 1864; March 11, 25, April 5, 15, 19, 22,
May 13, 17, June 14, 1865 - December 28, 1887; January 2, 1889 -
December 30, 1891; January 4, 1895 - December 29, 1897.

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the issues missing).

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August 11 - 25, September 15 - 29, October 20, 31, November 10 -
24, December 15, 1826.

Planter's Intelligencer, March 19, September 24, 1834; May 25,
November 30, 1836.

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1844 - December 2, 1854 (very scattered).

Red River Whig, April 25, November 14 - 28, 1840; January 23,
30, February 6, 26, May 1 - 15, July 10, October 2, 1841.

Southern Sentinel, May 29, August 1, 29, 1863.

Southern Transcript, March 27, 1844; May 1, 15, June 19, 26,
November 8, 1845.

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Amite

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February 13, 1892.

Amite City Gazette, April 10, 1885; August 19, 1887; June 28,
1889; May 23, 1890.

Amite City Independent, June 27, September 5, October 17, November
7 - 14, 1874; April 26, November 8, December 6, 1879; August 8,
1880; March 17, 1883; March 15, 29, October 4, 1884; August 20,
1889; June 20, 1891; May 11, 1895.

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26, 1867.

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Carrollton

Carrollton Star, April 19, 1851 - February 7, 1852.

Clinton

American Patriot, December 27, 1854 - January 12, 1856.

East Feliciana Democrat, September 16, November 11, 1865; July 21, September 1, 1866; January 2, 16, February 27, June 26, August 7 - 14, September 4 - 18, November 6 - December 4, 18 - 25, 1869; February 26, April 20 - 27, June 15, July 6, 1870; March 1, 1871.

East Feliciana Patriot, April 27, 1867; August 29, 1868; March 13, 1869 - June 24, 1871 (very scattered).

East Feliciana Patriot-Democrat, January 23, May 8, 1886.

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Louisianian, August 9 - September 6, 20 - October 25, November 8 - December 20, 1837; January 3 - March 30, April 13 - August 17, 1838.

Louisiana Floridian, September 17, 1845 - August 28, 1847; September 19, 1847 - November 23, 1850.

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Southern Watchman, November 2, 1878; March 28, 1885; April 13, May 4, 1889; April 22, 1893; April 14, 1894; February 3 - 25, March 17, 1899.

Colfax

The Chronicle, January 1, 1861 - December 30, 1899.

Convent

Creole Fireside, December 29, 1880 - December 26, 1883 (about half of the issues missing); January 2 - February 20, March 5 - December 19, 1895.

The Gazette, November 28, December 5 - 12, 1896; September 16 -
October 7, 17 - November 11, 25 - December 9, 1899.

The Interim, October 20, 1888 - December 23, 1899 (very scattered).

Louisianais, August 12, 1865 - July 29, 1871.

St. James Courier, December 20, 1888; July 4, 1889.

St. James Sentinel, March 5, 1873 - July 3, 1875 (very scattered).

Covington

St. Tammany Farmer, October 26, 1878 - December 12, 1884; January
2, 1888 - May 5, 1900.

Donaldsonville

Donaldsonville Chief, September 16, 1871 - September 2, 21, 1872;
September 13, 1873 - September 5, 1874; September 9, 1876 -
September 7, 1878; June 4, 1881; May 4, 1889; April 5, 1890;
February 1, 1898.

The Vigilant, July 16, October 4, 1846; August 21, 25, September
11, 25 - October 6, 16, 1847; February 2, 1849 - August 17,
1850 (very scattered).

Franklin

Planters' Banner, September 20, 1845 - January 4, 1855; April
11, July 11, September 5, December 5, 1868; January 23, 1869 -
December 7, 1870 (scattered issues); February 1, 15 - March
8, 1871.

St. Mary Banner, March 24, 1888; March 8, 1890; March 28, 1891.

Greensburg

Greensburg Imperial, April 25, May 30 - June 13, October 10,
1857; May 29, 1858; April 30, July 23, 30, August 6, 1859;
June 9 - 30, 1860; February 2 - 16, October 12, 1861.

St. Helena Echo, August 14, 1889; January 31, 1891 - December 29,
1899 (very scattered).

Star and Journal, August 28, 1869; May 13, 1871; August 3, 1872.

Hahnville

St. Charles Herald, January 5, 1883 - December 26, 1885; January
1 - February 12, May 7, 1887.

Hammond

The Hammond News, October 17, 1894 - October 9, 1895.

Harrisonburg

The Independent, May 27, June 3, September 23 - October 28,
December 23, 1857; January 20 - September 1, November 24 -
December 19, 1858; January 26 - March 9, April 13, 1859.

Jackson

Feliciana Republican, January 30, February 12, 1841.

Lafayette (Vermillionville)

Lafayette Advertiser, January 2 - July 17, 31 - October 2, 1869;
June 4 - April 12, May 3, 17 - December 27, 1873; January 10 -
17, February 7 - 14, March 14 - July 25, August 8 - 29, Septem-
ber 12 - November 28, 1874; January 5, 1878 - March 8, 22 -
July 19, August 2 - December 27, 1879.

Louisiana Cotton-Boll, April 2 - August 27, 1873.

Lake Providence

Banner Democrat, August 6 - December 31, 1892; January 21, 1893 -
December 22, 1894; May 25, 1895 - December 26, 1896; January 2,
1897 - December 30, 1899.

Carroll Banner, July 21 - August 9, 1887; December 15, 1888;
January 5, 1889 - June 11, 1892.

Carroll Conservative, September 15, 1877; July 20, August 17,
November 23-30, 1878; February 1, 1879.

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East Carroll Banner, April 26, 1890.

East Carroll Democrat, May 5, 1883 - December 13, 1884; March 27,
1886 - March 28, 1888.

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Monroe

Louisiana Intelligencer, March 18 - December 30, 1868.

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1882 - September 3, 1884; July 28, 1894.

Ourachita Register, December 1, 1859 - November 22, 1860.

Osage Telegraph, September 18, 1865; October 5, 1866 - December 23, 1871; January 6, 1872 - April 7, July 21, 28, September 22, 1876 - June 16, 1883; September 15, 1883, May 2, 1885; August 8, 1885 - December 28, 1889.

Morgan City

Free Press, July 22, 1880; April 18, 1889.

Review, July 6, December 14, 1889.

Napoleonville

Pioneer of Assumption, June 16, 1877 - May 25, June 15, 1889 - February 3, 1900.

Natchitoches

Democratic Review, April 9, 1885, January 26, 1888.

Louisiana Farmer, August 24, 1894 - March 10, 1899.

Natchitoches Enterprise, May 30, 1895; May 27 - June 3, 1897; June 7, 1900.

Natchitoches Union, October 24, 1861 - December 25, 1862.

The People's Vindicator, March 10, 1883.

New Iberia

Daily Iberian, September 2, 1897 - April 12, 1898.

Louisiana Sugar Bowl, November 3, 10, 24, 1870; October 19, 1871 - November 1, 1877; January 24, April 11, October 10, 1878; January 9, March 13, 27, 1879; January 1, 1880 - October 27, 1881.

Democrat, May 17 - July 26, 1890; May 23, 1891 - September 24, 1892.

Enterprise (semi-weekly), February 7 - October 7, 1885.

Planters' Banner, March 29, 1871 - April 17, 1872 (scattered).

The Stage, (irregular), Vol. VII, No. 1, September 7, 1890 - Vol. VII, No. 30, March 8, 1891; Vol. IX, No. 1, September 11 - Vol. IX, No. 15, December 20, 1892; Vol. IX, No. 17, January 19, 1893.

Weekly Iberian, July 7, 1894 - May 25, 1895; October 31, 1896 - August 21, 1897; April 9, 16, 1898; January 7 - August 26, 1899.

Opalouzas

The Courier, December 18, 1852 - December 1, 1860; January 4, 1862 - December 6, 1866 (few issues missing); May 11, 1867 - February 24, 1900 (only a few issues missing).

Gazette, November 20, 1841; January 1, 1842 - September 14, 1844; September 25, 1847 - September 6, 1848.

Journal, January 4, 1868 - December 29, 1877.

Patriot, March 3, 1855 - February 25, 1860 (few issues missing);
May 25 - October 12, 1861.

St. Landry Clarion, October 11, 1890 - September 30, 1899.

St. Landry Democrat, January 19, 1878 - February 24, 1894.

St. Landry Progress, July 27, 1867 - September 26, 1868.

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1846.

Southern Sentinel, October 14, 1865 - December 28, 1867.

Plaquemine

Gazette and Sentinel, April 17, July 31, 1858; August 4, 1860 -
July 27, 1861.

Iberville South, August 26, 1865 - July 3, 1869; September 30,
October 28, 1876; January 6, 1877 - October 15, 1898 (few issues
missing).

Southern Sentinel, August 6, 1853 - August 4, 1855.

Pointe-A-La-Hache

Plaquemine Protector, January 8, 1887 - March 24, 1900.

Pointe Coupee (New Roads)

Democrat, April 27, May 18, June 1, September 28, 1861; March 1,
1862.

Echo, April 8, 1848; December 8, 1866; March 2, 1867; January 9,
23 - June 19, July 17, 24, August 14 - December 25, 1869; August
20, 27, September 24 - October 8, November 20 - December 17,
1870.

Port Allen (West Baton Rouge)

Capitolian Vis-A-Vis, September 1, 1852 - October 4, 1854.

Sugar Planter, January 5, 1856 - December 7, 1861; January 27,
1866 - January 22, 1870.

St. Francisville (and Bayou Sara)

Asylum and Feliciana Advertiser, November 8, 1821 - July 30, 1825
(very scattered).

Bayou Sara Ledger, September 13, 1843; September 21, 1844; February
28, May 11, December 25, 1852; August 20, 1853; May 18, June 8,
22, August 31, September 7, 28, December 7, 1861; January 4, May
31, June 28, 1862.

The Churchman, September 22, 1888 - December 29, 1888.

The Crisis, November 22, 1828.

Democrat, December 2, 1841.

Dunn Leader, April 19, May 10, 1873 - June 12, 1875.

Feliciano Herald, November 20, 1896 - December 25, 1898.

Feliciano Ledger, (Bayou Sara), May 19, November 3, 1866; March 16, 1867; January 25, 1868; January 9, 1869 - January 6, 1877 (scattered issues).

Feliciano Republican, May 8, 1869 - March 29, 1873 (very scattered).

Florida Gazette, June 27, 1829.

Industrial News, September 26, 1888 - December 11, 1889.

The Louisianian, May 8, October 30 - December 11, 1819; January 8 - May 27, 1820.

Louisiana Chronicle, February 10, 1838; August 21, 1841; January 1, 1842; May 6, July 1, 8, October 28, 1843; June 28, 1845; December 13, 20, 1851; February 11, 1854.

Louisiana Churchmen and Industrial News, May 16, 1888 - September 19, 1888.

Louisiana Journal, February 5, 1824 - October 18, 1828 (very scattered); February 8, 1838.

The Phoenix, September 21, 1833.

Phoenix Ledger, January 16, 1858.

Phoenix and Advertiser, (Bayou Sara), September 7, 1833; August 1, October 27, 1835.

The Time Piece, April 25, 1811 - January 17, 1815 (very scattered).

True Democrat, February 3, 1892 - January 27, 1900.

West Feliciana Sentinel, January 13, 1877 - December 25, 1880; January 6, March 11, 1882; January 13, 1883-August 3, 1889; September 13 - December 13, 1890; January 3, 1891 - December 3, 1892.

St. Martinville

Weekly Messenger, February 27, 1886 - February 3, 1900.

Tallulah

Madison Journal. April 13, May 4, 18, June 29, 1889; July 11, 1891;
May 7, 1898.

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Thibodaux

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The Sentinel. August 5, 1865 - August 4, 1894; August 3, 1895 -
January 20, 1900.

Vernon

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Southern Times. April 15, 1859 - January 27, 1860.

Winnfield

Sentinel. June 2, 1892.

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1890.

MISCELLANEOUS**Charts**

Harrison, H. S. "Distribution of French Speech in Louisiana," (December, 1948). Linguistic Atlas of Louisiana Manuscript. Department of Speech, Louisiana State University.

Diaries

Marston, Henry W. Pocket Diary. 1855. Henry W. Marston and Family Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

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Acts of the Legislature of the State of Louisiana, 1812-1900. Louisiana Room, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

Acts of the Territory of Orleans Legislative Council, 1803-1811. Louisiana Room, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University.

"Comstock, Tutor vs. Nicholls," Court Docket No. 2561. (May, 1856).
Seventh Judicial District Court, State of Louisiana. East Feliciana Parish Courthouse, Clinton, Louisiana.

Regulations for the Government of the Academy of Clinton, Louisiana, 1826. John, Thomas, C. W. Ellis and Family Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

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Letters

J. E. Hawkins Papers

Letters to Dr. J. R. Hawkins from A. D. Harmanson (dated April 27 and May 25, 1879, from Simmesport, Louisiana). Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

Josiah Lawton Letter

Letter to John Avery Collins, Newport, Rhode Island, from Josiah Lawton (dated March 10, 1811, from St. Francisville, Louisiana). Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

Isaac O. Tuttle Letter

Letter to Miss Maria Seeley, Fair Haven, Connecticut, from Isaac O. Tuttle (dated August 3, 1840, from Franklin, Louisiana). Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

David Weeks and Family Papers

Letter to Elizabeth F. Conrad from F. B. and A. T. Conrad (dated April 2, 1826, from New Orleans). Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

Minute Books

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University.

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mencement Program," St. Mary's Academy, Natchitoches, Louisiana,
June, 28, 1892; "Bianville Amateur Theatrical Club Concert,"
Rescue Plantation (Melrose, Louisiana), April 7, 1893. Depart-
ment of Archives, Louisiana State University.

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"Grand Masonic Installation Ball," Masonic Hall, Clinton, Louisiana,
December 27, 1872; "Grand Mask, and Fancy Dress Ball," Masonic Hall,
Clinton, Louisiana, February 17, 1874. Department of Archives,
Louisiana State University.

BIOGRAPHY

Clinton W. Bradford was born in Grapevine, Arkansas, on November 5, 1909. He attended elementary school at Ain, Arkansas, and high school at the academy of the Missionary Baptist College, Sheridan, Arkansas. He received the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Arkansas in 1938 and the Master of Arts degree from the State University of Iowa in 1941. He taught for nine years in the public schools of Arkansas and Iowa between 1929 and 1942. He served in the United States Armed Forces between June, 1942, and December, 1945. He was assistant professor in English and speech at Arkansas State Teachers College in 1946; at Louisiana State University he was graduate assistant in English during 1946 and 1947, graduate assistant in speech during 1949 and 1950, and assistant professor in speech during 1950 and 1951.

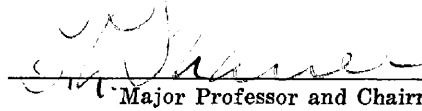
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

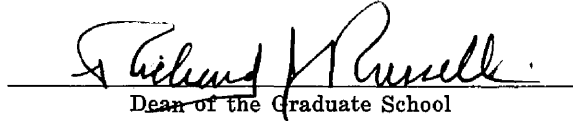
Candidate: **Clinton W. Bradford**

Major Field: **Speech**

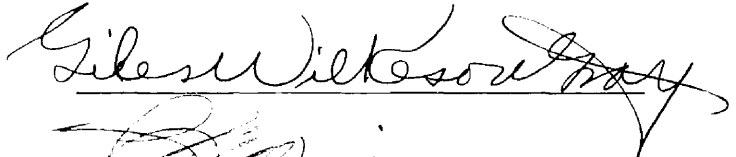
Title of Thesis: **THE NON-PROFESSIONAL THEATER IN LOUISIANA: A SURVEY OF ORGANIZED
AND MISCELLANEOUS THEATRICAL ACTIVITIES FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO 1900**

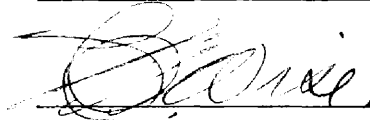
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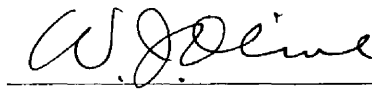

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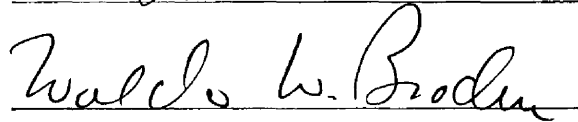

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:











Date of Examination: **August 3, 1951**